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Vol. V.



THE SANDY-WHISKERED TRAMP MOUNTED AN OLD BARREL AND COMMENCED TO YELL AND GESTICULATE WILDLY. 3

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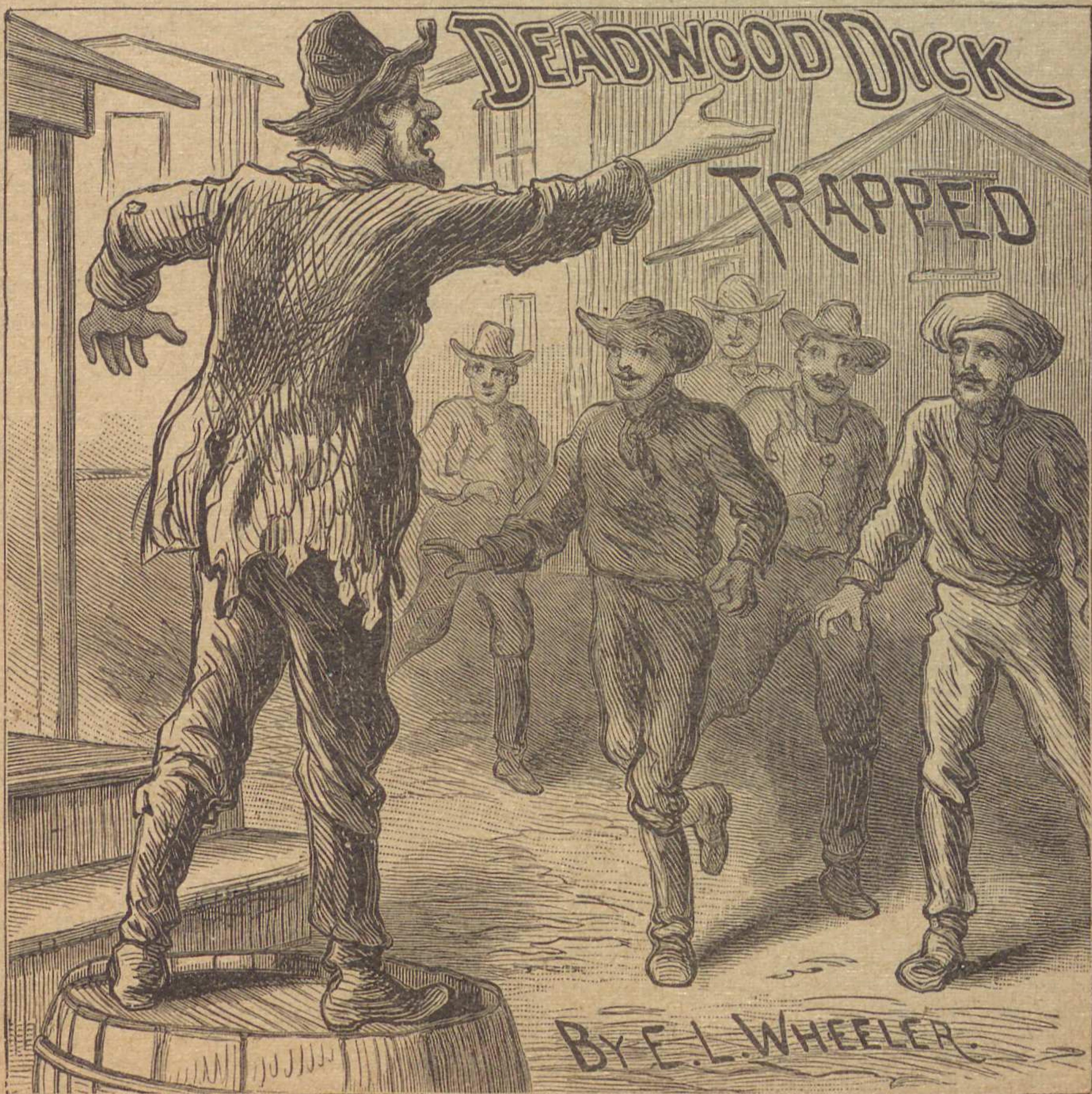
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THE SANDY-WHISKERED TRAMP MOUNTED AN OLD BARREL AND COMMENCED TO YELL AND GESTICULATE WILDLY.

Deadwood Dick Trapped;

OR,

ROXEY RALPH'S RUSE.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I. RICHARD GOLD-DUST.

PISTOLVILLE!

Though not a bonanza town, or subject to any particular "boom," was, withal, in its own opinion quite "fly," and considered itself a hundred-fold greater place of importance than Devil's Nugget, up the gulch, or Skeleton Flats, an equal distance down the gulch.

Pistolville was situated on the narrow, sandy bottom of a rugged mountain gulch, which latter was a sort of golden belt running from Devil's Nugget to Skeleton Flats, rewarding devotees of the pick and shovel, wheresoever inclination might lead them to dig.

There was a general supply-store, a couple of saloons, a banking or trust office, a smithy, saw-mill and smelting and crushing mill combined, and a rude log structure on the door of which was lettered, "School No. 1."

Perhaps Pistolville had never had such a thing as a school, but then, not to be beaten by Skeleton Flats, they had erected the edifice, and all that was wanting was a teacher.

To meet this requirement Big Hank Haddon had posted a placard on the building, in a conspicuous place, so that passers by might have the benefit of it.

It read as follows:

"NOTISS!"

"WANTED:—A fu'st-class tutor to take hold an' run this shebang, in gud style, cheap fer chips. No feller w'ot ain't acquaint wi' ther higher branches o' studies an' cluss shutin', needn't apply.

"HANK HADDON, Mayor."

The "Mayor" was of course a superfluity on the part of Henry, for Pistolville had no established ruler or government further than individual "blow" went, and being a typical "bad" man, such as are sure to be found in every place, Haddon considered himself "boss."

September is always a delightful month in the Sierras, and it was on one pleasant September evening that a man finished a sketch of the falls, at which he had been working several hours, and putting his book under his arm, sauntered down toward Pistolville, which was bathed in the last rays of the dying sunset.

A man of four or five-and-twenty, gracefully built and eminently good-looking, with his clear-cut features, dark-brown eyes and somewhat darker hair and mustache, he was unlike the citizens of Pistolville.

When the artist came to the untenanted school-building he paused and read the notice attentively, then read it over again, as if it had some especial interest to him.

Seeing which, Haunted Hank, as the self-styled "mayor" was nick-named, and a few of his pards made bold to cross over.

"Halloo, daisy!" the mayor saluted, taking a quid of tobacco from his mouth and hurling it against the placard, so that it to some extent obliterated the word "Notiss." "I say, halloo, stranger."

"Hello, sir!" the artist responded, raising his hat and looking the surprise he may or may not have felt. "I see the town wants a schoolmaster?"

"Waal, I 'spect that's about the dimensions of it, beauty. Interlect ar' sought fer by ther byees an' gals o' Pistolville."

"Ah, indeed? That is good. You could direct me to the mayor, perhaps?"

"Presumedly, stranger, fer I'm ther honorable party, you bet."

"Oh, you are?"

And a peculiar expression crept into the artist's face.

"Yas, I *aire!*" Henry asseverated, boldly. "I'm the high-cockolorum who controls ther destiny o' this hyar town, an' I runs it, you bet, an' any galoot w'ot sez *nay* gits his ear chawed off."

"Ah, I see! And so you want a competent man to instruct the young idea how to shoot, eh?"

"Not much! I allow ther boys knows how ter do that. What we want is simply a chapter l'arn ther boys how ter write, read, spell an' cipher; an', mind ye, I don't hold myself responsible fer funeral expenses."

"Oh! I don't anticipate the need of an undertaker, as I have had some success in getting on the right side of children. How old do the scholars average?"

Haunted Hank laughed outright, and his companions grinned bugely.

"Their age, beauty? Waal, now, I don't know so much about that, but ye can see the size of 'em—these hyar be a fair sample."

And the bystanders were indicated as the example.

The artist looked surprised, and gave vent to a whistle.

"Oh! then it is to be a school of adults? Are there no children?"

"Nary a kid."

"And no girls?"

"Waal, I dunno. Roxie—that's Bill Ralph's gal—ar' a harum-scarum, an' I reckon ye wouldn't want her, 'ca'se ef she tuk a notion to giggle, and you objected, she'd pop ye over like she would a prairie chicken. Then there's old Dutch Joe's darter, Dora Dare, a stuck-up little piece, who reads hymns an' novels an' sech—I reckon she'd not bother ye; an' Starlight, the Ponca gal, who occasionally comes to town, she don't need tew git any smarter than she is now. Thet composes our female population."

"Indeed! I am sorry for that, as ladies are great civilizers," the artist declared, and somehow his auditors took it as a broad hint that they needed civilizing.

And, accordingly, they exchanged glances.

"See hyar, my fine feller!" Haunted Hank said, gruffly, "et won't do fer ye tew tackle us that way. We kin be as mild as a streak o' sunshine, or we kin roar like a blizzard. We're

game, we aire, an' ye're ther very kind o' a young lamb fit tew eat, when ye r'ile us."

"Of course. No doubt you, all put together, could get away with me in short order," assented the artist, with a gracious smile. "Nevertheless, notwithstanding, howsoever, plural, we will not discuss the point at present, but I will bid you adieu, with the notice that if you should want me to undertake the government of your school, you will find me somewhere about the city. Ta! ta! tra! la! lee!"

And, waving his hand, the sketcher sauntered on down the street.

Pistolville boasted of a hotel and saloon combined, where, for four "bits," a rather narrow meal could be had, and to this the artist wended his way.

After engaging accommodations for a few days, a book was shoved toward him by the blear-eyed clerk, and in a graceful hand he registered himself as "Richard Gold-dust, New York."

Then, lighting a cigar, he was shown to his room, and was seen no more until later in the evening.

But that mattered not.

In less than half an hour after his arrival every person in Pistolville knew that a genuine "skulemaster" had come to town, and that he was a very "toney" chap; so, as a matter of course, every one who had not seen him was on the qui vive to have "a squint at ther sport."

During the evening, Mr. Richard Gold-dust sauntered down into the crowded saloon for a fresh cigar, and as a result became the target for many glances.

To his surprise, as he stood at the bar, a girl, attired in pants, top-boots, long hunting blouse and jaunty slouch hat, and mounted on a superannuated-looking donkey, rode from a rear portion of the room straight up to a position alongside the bar next to the artist.

And the donkey gave vent to a bray that caused Mr. Gold-dust a violent start, whereat the rider burst into a hearty laugh, a musical, ringing laugh that was pleasant to hear.

The rider was not a woman yet—probably at the most she was not over seventeen, with a petite, well-rounded figure, and a fresh, rosy face, laughing and lovable in expression, and eyes that sparkled with youthful spirit—eyes that could gleam with stern or friendly light—and hair brown and wavy, tossing in unrestrained wealth upon her shoulders.

Gold-dust watched her curiously; then was about to turn away, but she laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Stop! hold up a bit, cap'n! I've got somethin' more to say to you. I heer you're to be the new schulemaster. Now, d'ye calculate ye kin tame your scholars?"

"If I take yonder school and undertake to instruct those who may apply for instruction, I shall naturally have a code of discipline, and expect every scholar to follow it. If they refuse, I shall give them the choice of behavior or leaving."

"And if they refuse to do either?"

"Oh, well, if it comes to that, it will remain to be seen who will be master of the situation."

"Oh! yes; he'll make a fine school-teacher," a

voice at this instant cried from another part of the room. "Just imagine, for instance, what a great amount of brains may be contained in that pate, or what powerful strokes of lightning the hardness of that cheek could resist!"

Gold-dust spotted the speaker, even as he was giving utterance to the words, and walked straight over to where he was standing. He was rather a dashing-looking fellow, both in face, figure and attire, and was somewhere near the artist's own age, but there was an expression about his black eyes and mustache-shaded mouth which was sinister and evil.

"I presume you were referring to me," Gold-dust said, with calmness. "Evidently my presence here in Pistolville is offensive, and again perhaps you have some other remark to offer?"

"Yes. You're a swell-head and a snide, and there is no room here for you!" the insulter retorted.

"I'll show you," and out went his arm, and down went the offender!

CHAPTER II.

DAUGHTER AND FATHER.

IMMEDIATE excitement succeeded the knock-down, making the aspect of affairs decidedly unhealthy looking for the artist.

"Hurra! Look ye, pilgrims o' Pistolville—that's ther style o' a hairpin as wants ter set himself up as our school-teacher! How d'ye like him, b'yees? What caliber d'ye put him at, fu'st glance?"

Not a man ventured a reply. Evidently they did not propose to make too personal remarks about Gold-dust Dick, as he had already been nicknamed, until they knew the man better.

And as for Richard, himself, he stood calmly waiting for a return attack from the man he had knocked down.

But when that individual scrambled to his feet with a bleeding nose, and pair of bruised eyes, he simply shook his fist at the artist, with a muttered execration.

"Look out for me! I'll have revenge for this, or my name is not Tra-la-lee Charley!" he growled, and then went out to wash the blood from his face.

"Tra-la-lee Who-ever-you-may-be, you'll find that I run my school," the artist retorted, and turned to make his way up-stairs, when he was intercepted by Haunted Hank and Cowhide Sam.

"Hold up, beauty!" the mayor said, extending his hand. "Afore ye go, give us yer flipper, an' allow us ter congratulate ye! Thar's nothin' slow about you, except yer feet, an' they'll outgrow criticism, in due time. In ther mean time, we, ther representative pillars o' this city, have put our craniums together, and come to the conclusion that no fitter man than you can be selected to manage our school. Tharfore, do we beg an' beseech you to accept ther persish, at twenty dollars a week, and break the head of the first rascal who refuses to mind you."

"Is this the verdict of the crowd?" Gold-dust demanded in a loud enough tone, so that all could hear.

"Yas, you bet! What saith I, Heneri, the sixty-fifth apostle, hez ter be so. All in favor o'

seein' Gold-dust Dick our skulemaster, please make manerfest by sayin' I!"

"I!" "I!" came a vigorous response from the majority of the crowd, while to Haddon's "Contrary, no!" there came only a few answers.

"Thank ye, gentlemen!" Gold-dust said, with a bow. "To-morrow I will draw up a code of rules and regulations, and on the following day will begin school, sincerely trusting I shall have an obedient and exemplary roll of pupils. Good-evening!"

Then, with another bow, he took his leave, while there was a grim silence among the rude audience.

There were no audible expressions uttered against him, but it was pretty evident that Gold-dust Dick had not yet secured any particularly firm hold upon the affections of these Pistolvillians, and that was not good.

Gold-dust Dick was not seen until the next day, when he left the hotel, and sauntered down to his future place of business, the "school-'us."

Approaching the cabin, he entered it, and found to his surprise that it had an occupant, and that, too, in the person of a pretty young lady, who might have been in the last year of her teens, and who was plainly but neatly dressed, and very comely of face and figure.

"Oh! excuse me," she said, rising with a flushed countenance—"I—I—"

"Oh! do not disturb yourself, pray," he said, doffing his hat, "as I am going right away. I just dropped in to post up a notice, concerning the school—that's all."

And drawing forth a sheet of paper he proceeded to tack it up on one corner of the blackboard.

"Oh! you are the new schoolmaster, then?" the young lady said, resuming her seat, with a book before her. "I am so glad we are to have a school! Education is one of the things most needed here, in Pistolvile."

"I agree with you, and I dare say I shall have my hands full in trying to civilize the fellows who are to be my scholars. Will I have you for a pupil, Miss Dare?"

"Ah! you know my name, then?"

"I heard of you as being one of the three ladies in the district, and inferred that you were Miss Dare."

"Ah, yes! Well, I don't think you need to enroll me as a pupil, as I would scarcely wish to be your only lady pupil, among so rough a crowd. If you could give me private instructions at my home, when papa is there—"

"Why, certainly. Is Mr. Dare home evenings?"

"Alas! no—I would that he were," she said, sadly, and turned her head away.

She had a trouble then?

Gold-dust realized that much, but he finished tacking up the paper before he spoke again.

"Mr. Dare is a business man, I presume?" he said, finally.

"Yes, sir. He is unfortunately a partner in the Volcano, the best mine in Pistolvile, with the man Tra-la-lee Charley, whom I have heard you knocked down last evening."

"Ha! yes. He made some personal remarks that 'riled me,' as they say here in the mines, and I so far forgot myself as to knock him down. So your father is in partnership with *him*?"

"Yes, sir. My father formerly owned the whole of the Volcano, but this man Tra-la-lee Charley got him to drinking, and next to gambling, and all that I can tell you is that the villain now owns a half interest in the Volcano—owns it through cheating my poor misguided father, who is but a wreck of his former self. Oh! sir, what would I not give to see my father the brave, upright, noble man he was!"

"Cannot his own daughter's love lure him back?"

"Oh! I fear not. I have entreated him, and pleaded with him, and used every effort, but he seems to have lost all sense of shame or affection."

"I am very sorry for you, miss," Gold-dust said, "and if ever I encounter the old gentleman, I will exert my influence on him, for his good, mayhap."

Then, raising his hat, the new schoolmaster took his departure.

"What a strange fellow! It would seem that he has no desire to cultivate my acquaintance," Miss Dare said to herself after he had gone.

It was late that night when, in the window of a little room over the hotel saloon where Gold-dust Dick had put up, there shone a flickering light that made a yellow shadow across the street in the blank darkness of the night.

In the little room sat two men on either side of a round deal table with a pack of cards between them, supplemented by a bottle of liquor and some glasses.

The more attractive appearing of the two was the young man—Tra-la-lee Charley.

He was attired in a red smoking-cap and gay dressing-gown, and his mustache was waxed out to a needle's point, giving him a decidedly dandified appearance.

His companion was a typical "bum." He was red-faced, with an extra tinge on the end of his nose; his hair was long and matted; his attire was greasy and slouchy; his eyes were dull and vacant in expression.

This was Joe Dare—Dutch Joe—the father of the girl Gold-dust Dick had met at the schoolhouse, and it needed no shrewd observer to draw the conclusion that it would not take many more bottles of poison to use the poor wretch up.

As we look in upon the scene, he was dozing in his chair, while Tra-la-lee Charley was folding up some papers and placing them in his pocket.

"Come! come! Wake up, Joe!" The gambler cried, when he had placed the book in his pocket, and he reached over and shook the sleeper by the arm.

"Eh! v'ot ish dot?" Dare grunted, looking up, sleepily; "v'ot you vant, Sharley?"

"I want you to wake up, and have some style about you. What in blazes ails you?"

"Vell, I dell you. I t'ink I vas Rip Van Winkle, in my dream, v'ot sleep twenty years, und v'en I wake up, I find you sdeal all mine wealth, marry mine Dora, und raise der duylfel

in sheneral. I dell you v'ot, Sharley, I t'ink I shwear off."

"Like Rip did, eh? Ha! ha! ha! good joke, for a man of your intellect, Joe. By the way, it's a long time between drinks, and so let's smile, to your good luck."

"My goot luck! How vas dot? Haf I not lost eferv game?"

"By no means. You must be boozy indeed. You have won the last six straight games."

"Ish dot so? Vell, I didn't remember dot. Vos we blaying for somedings?"

"To be sure not. Why, bless you, for the last week you have refused to play for stakes, and have won 'most every game. If you'd 'a' 'chipped' you'd have long ago won back all I ever won of you."

"Vell, dot vas foolishness mit me, den. How much ofer half der mine do I owe you, Sharley?"

"Oh! a trifling sum. I have your note for four thousand dollars, and that covers everything."

"A note, you dells me, Sharley?"

"To be sure—a note to secure me, you see."

"Vell, I don'd know. Did I efer sign a note to you?"

"Well, no—not exactly; that is, you see, I drew it up for the amount you owe me, and some time when you get ready, why you can sign it. I know you're honest, and consequently am in no hurry."

"Yas, I vas honest—dot vas der drubbles—I vas too honest. V'ot you say der mine is vorth now?"

"Oh! probably a trifle over a half a million, though it wouldn't sell for that, as the yield is not so large as a month ago."

"Und I vas gamble avay all dot money? Vell, I vas a pig fool!"

"What—you're not getting pious?"

"Nix. I vas not so sleeby, dough, ash usual. I play you cards no more, Dra-la-loo Sharley!"

"Well, I am right sorry for that, Joe. We've spent some jolly nights together, and although you've lost a thimbleful, you've gained, in the long run, by learning how to play a fine game. I think if you play your half of the Volcano against my half, you would win."

"Humph! you dink I vas a fool again? You would like to get hold off der whole pizness, now, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed, no. You wrong me. To prove to you that I do not seek to enrich myself at your expense I will play you a game for a thousand dollars, and if you do not win I'll give you back my half interest in the Volcano."

"Vel, Sharley, dot vas goot. I allus t'ink you vas square, and so vil I be. Ve drink, den play. If I win, I come around to-morrow night und play my half for your half of der Volcano."

"Good!" the gambler said, producing a fresh pack of cards. "That is liberal of you."

"And may I beg leave to watch this interesting game?"

They looked around.

Just within the room stood Gold-dust Dick.

CHAPTER III.

A LIVELY SCHOOL AND MAD STAGING.

SCHOOL commenced the next day at the usual hour, and the fact caused something akin to a

celebration in Pistolvile, for business was literally suspended on the part of a number of miners, who were anxious to see how the "thing worked."

So that, while some twenty odd roughs walked into the rude school-house when the bell rung, as many burly bewhiskered and bewhiskied non-attendants were grouped on the outside, peering in at the door and windows.

They were anxious to see what school was and how it progressed, and then they rather expected to see the new educator "cleaned out."

But Gold-dust Dick had not taken the school for any such a purpose; he had come there with a determination to run it, and, judging by his appearance this morning, he intended to do it.

As soon as the rude delegation of would-be scholars were seated, pretty much wherever they pleased about the house, Dick rapped smartly on the table with his ferule and said:

"Order!"

And there was order instanter. You could have heard a pin drop.

"Children," announced the new pedagogue, sternly, "I am here for the purpose of teaching you several branches of studies, which it has not been your privilege heretofore to learn, and I hope and trust you will be obedient to the rules of the school. On each desk you will find a primer, which two of you can study for the first half-hour. How many of you know how to read?"

Every man present held up his hand.

"Very well. Writing and spelling will be the first course of studies. Henry, can you spell philosophy?"

"Not by a durned sight, boss. D'ye take me fer a reg'lar organized dictionary? Give me sumthin' easier."

"Not so many remarks, please. For the first lesson, you can all learn to spell the words upon the first and second pages. Remember, no talking aloud, whispering, smoking or laughing will be tolerated."

"Now, ef a feller wants to snicker, he can, can't he?" Cowhide Sam grunted.

"No, sir! Strict silence and order during study-hours must be observed, or I shall have to punish the offender. Go peaceably about your studies now, and all will be well."

And as they all obeyed, the watchers on the outside turned away in disgust, not seeing the "racket" they had expected.

But as Gold-dust had anticipated, the day was destined not to pass by without a disturbance with the scholars.

Shortly before it was time to dismiss school for noon, Cowhide Sam rose from his seat, put on his hat, and then his coat, as if to leave.

"Take your seat, sir! School has not yet been dismissed," Dick ordered, dropping his ferule and picking up a revolver.

"Can't help that!" Samuel retorted, doggedly.

"Make another move to leavethe room before I dismiss you, and I'll drop you!"

"Drop and be hanged! Hyar goes for bug-juice!" the ruffian cried, and instantly he made a leap through a window.

But a bullet from Gold-dust's revolver over-

took him, quick as he was, and he tumbled out of the window with a painful wound in his thigh.

"Come on, if any more of you want the same," the schoolmaster cried, turning upon the crowd with flashing eyes.

"I opine we ain't so green as ter buck ag'in' a snag!" Haunted Hank growled, with a glance at his companions.

"But, arter school's out, stranger, I go ye one that about the healthiest thing ye kin do is to lock up the school-'us', and *git*!"

"Thank you for the suggestion, which I presume will not be adopted," the artist replied, calmly. "When I conclude to leave, I'll do so, unadvised. I will now dismiss school one hour, for noon, and you may pass quietly out."

They obeyed, Gold-dust bringing up the rear, and striding fearlessly toward the hotel, with no apparent thought of danger, but he was not unmindful of the fact that he was exposing himself openly to a treacherous attack in the rear, and that his life hung, as it were, by a thread.

The mutinous gang stood near the schoolhouse, and watched him stride away, without making an effort to stop him.

But there was no more school that day.

Although the teacher was on deck, no scholars came.

What would be the result of the forenoon's fracas, he did not know, but he had a pretty good idea that the majority of the population would be down on him, as it seemed to be mainly made up of the Haunted Hank type.

That night was a wild one—and only those who have "been thar" can have much of an idea what a wild night in the mining country means, as compared with the "wild night" storms in the East.

It was such a night, succeeding the day of Gold-Dust Dick's first attempt at keeping school in Pistolvile, and the storm was at its hight, when the stage from Skeleton Flats rolled down on its way through a mountain dugway, toward Pistolvile, whence trains of that immediate mining district went eastward, every other day at sunset.

It was usual for the stage to connect with this Overland train of white-roofed prairie schooners, but to-day there had been a landslide along the route, which had delayed them into the night. Consequently the evening was well advanced toward midnight, when the ponderous coach came tearing down over the rough mountain trail, drawn by four fractious spans of horses, which were dexterously handled by a burly, good-natured looking Jehu, in whose eyes gleamed a spirit of deviltry, and around whose mouth was ever an expression of humor,

Jim Jordan was a veteran of the reins, and fear of accident, or care therefor, was something he never stopped to consider.

Freighted with an even score of humans was the stage—men of rough bearded visage and dirty dress, with only one woman within the coach and one outside.

The woman inside was wrapped in a linen duster, wore a modestly-trimmed walking-hat, and kept her face closely veiled.

The female on the outside was harum-scarum Roxie Ralph, who, with all the wildness and abandon of some wild untamed savage, sat her seat beside Jordan, and seemed to enjoy the fearful nocturnal ride, as she held her little chip hat in her hand, and let the roaring storm blow her hair in confusion about her shoulders.

"Oh! this is just scrumptious, Jim," she yelled, in the fearless Jenu's ear, as they dashed down through the black rugged dugway. "Let 'em out fer all they're worth."

"Whoa!" screeched Jordan, loud above the storm, and he settled the horses back upon their haunches with a sudden movement of seeming superhuman strength.

The cause was obvious.

Roxie saw it and comprehended.

Clinging to one side of the coach as it thundered along into an abrupt halt, was a masked man, who held the muzzle of a large cocked revolver close to the side of Jordan's head, and the consciousness of this same fact was what had caused the Jehu to halt.

He knew what he meant.

And so did Roxie, when she took a second peering glance about, and saw a couple more of masked men at either carriage door and another clinging to the bits of the fore leaders.

For the first time in the history of the Pistolvile stage, it had been halted by those "operators" known as road-agents.

CHAPTER IV.

ROXIE'S ACT.

ROAD-AGENTS had from time to time haunted near.

The man who clung to the side of the stage and covered Jim Jordan, was a wiry, athletic fellow, who looked as if he might be a hard one to handle in a tussle. His attire was dark, and the mask which covered his face to his chin was met at the forehead by a wide rimmed sombrero, looped up on one side, and ornamented with a feather.

"Lucky thing you're late to-night!" he said, to Jordan. "Most auspicious time for our business. Got anything in the treasure-box? If so, I'll thank you for the keys."

"Oh, yes. You are perfectly welcome to them!" Jordan gritted, grimly. "I never felt in a more accommodating mood in my life."

And, reaching into his pocket, he drew forth a bunch of keys and handed them over to the road-agent, after which that gent for a second lowered his aim, as he jumped to the ground.

It was a fatal action on his part.

Roxie Ralph had been watching matters, narrowly, and when he leaped to the ground, she pulled a revolver from her own belt, and fired upon him. And, at the same instant, it seemed, she snatched the reins from Jordan's hands and gave vent to a shrill yell that sent the trained animals flying down the trail.

The captain of the road-agents fell backward to the ground—two others and the man at the horses' heads were knocked down and run over, owing to the suddenness of the action.

The other two who escaped uninjured were bold enough to send a couple of flying shots after the departing stage, none of which did

any damage, except that one passed through the upper portion of the "plug" hat worn by the pious-appearing individual who clung to the top of the stage.

And the stage rolled on down into Pistolvile without further incident to check its progress, and, as may be supposed, after arriving there, the stage-coach robbery, or rather the attempt thereat, which had been frustrated by Roxie Ralph, had a thorough discussion.

And after every man had had his say about it, and expressed opinions as various as could be, Haunted Hank scratched his head, closed one eye, spat at a fly on the rugged wall of the saloon, and remarked:

"Yas, boyees, et's a new wrinkle on ther horoscope, an', twixt you, myself an' ther nutmeg grater, I reckon ther head-gearin' o' that gang gets his grub pretty nigh ter hum. Without further palaver, I'll leave ye to draw your own inferences. Ta! ta—tra-la-lee!"

Several days passed without further event of importance, until about a week had elapsed, when several little incidents occurred to divert the people's minds from ordinary topics.

Gold-dust Dick, since his ill-success at starting an "education factory" in Pistolvile, as the denizens termed it, had leased a small, unpaying claim of a disgusted "tenderfoot," put up a little shanty on it, and made it his headquarters and the scene of his labors. What yield rewarded his efforts no one knew, but it was surmised by would-be wise ones that he was not getting rich.

One night, just as the Bourbon was about to put out lights and dismiss its rather "boozy" patrons, a miner entered the place, strode up to the bar, and smote it heavily with his fist.

The action aroused the attention of those assembled.

"Feller-citizens!" the miner started, with a look of profound mystery, "I would recall to yer minds a remark made some time since by our venerable brother Henery, the Ha'nted. Is thar a galoot present who can recall to mem'ry ther expression referred to?"

"Waal, now, you bet!" Haddon cried, starting up from his seat at a card table, where he had been dozing. "At that pecooliar period aforesaid I did beg to asseverate that et were my opine that the captain o' ther gang o' road-agents war quartered purty nigh to hum, or words tew that effect!"

"An' ye kin bet yer boots ye weren't fur from right! I hev reason ter know et. D'ye know whar ther shanty o' Gold-dust Dick is located?"

A sort of grunt was the answer.

"Yas, I reckon ye all know," the miner continued, whose name was Briggs. "Waal, ye see, suspectin' things weren't exactly diagonal, I've been lurkin' around ther skulemaster's place once and awhile o' late, and, when I war in ther vicinity last night, who d'ye suppose I see'd lurkin' around the shanty?"

"A road-agent!" suggested Rattlesnake John, brilliantly. John was noted for brilliancy, by the way.

"Oh! not by a long shot! It was Silver Fox, the Lone Ponca, all in war-paint, too. I reckon

by his actions he was figgerin' slyly around fer a confab wi' his nibs, Gold-dust Dick."

A scowl of displeasure went over the faces of those within the saloon.

Silver Fox the Ponca was a person more feared by the Pistolvillians than all the road-agents, for he was a stern old war-chief of the once strong Ponca race, who had his quarters up in an invulnerable part of the mountains, and with a band of renegade reds from many different tribes bade defiance to those pale-faces who tried to capture him.

Occasionally a scalpless miner or a robbed treasury came to light—all of which were presumed tokens of his vengeance.

Therefore the sullen looks with which the miners received the news.

"An' mind ye, that ain't all—no sir!" Briggs went on. "To-night I antied around to see how things lay, an' awhile ago I see'd five masked men come down out o' the mountains an' go to Gold-dust Dick's shanty an' enter the place. They were thar about five minnits, then they cum out, an' thar waz six of 'em, lookin' as nigh alike as two peas. Now, how do that strike ye?"

A growl of anger escaped the listeners, to whom there could only be one meaning, and that was that Gold-dust Dick was not only connected with the road-agents, but also was allied to their mortal enemy, Silver Fox the Ponca.

"An' now what's to be did? Ye don't need any further proof that Gold-dust Dick is a rascal!" Haunted Hank remarked. "I propose we lay for him when he comes back and show him a trick learnt us by Father Lynch."

"Yes! string him up—shoot him—snatch him bald-headed!" responded a dozen.

"No, poys, dot don'd vas fair pizness," Dutch Joe said, from his perch on the top of a table, where he sat smoking, several degrees less intoxicated than was usual with him. "I say, giff every man a show, if id vas no more und a circus or pigeon-shoot. I don'd t'ink dot Gold-dust Dick vas such a man ash dot."

"Oh! now, ye never think as others do," Haunted Hank snarled. "When ye see that gal o' yourn hitched up wi' thet cut-throat, mebbe ye'll change yer polyticks."

"Mine Dora marry, nix; she neffer marry nobodys," Dare said, proudly. "She always stay single, mit me."

"Oho! Then my eyes are durned bias ef I didn't see her huggin' an' kissin' ther skulemaster t'other night."

"V'ot you tell me, Haddon? You seen mir Dora kiss der schoolmaster?" Joe demanded, fiercely.

"Waal, I should shudder ef I didn't."

"I don't p'lieve it—you vas a liar, Hank Haddon!"

For a second a pinfall could have been heard within the old Bourbon. Haunted Hank turned and glared at Dare a moment as if dumfounded.

What did it mean? Did his senses deceive him? Had Dutch Joe dared to insult him—Joe Dare, of all men, who had ever manifested a desire to run from a fight rather than to take part in one?

It did not seem probable nor possible to the

bully of Pistolville of whom most men stood in abject fear.

Yet there was no denying that Joe had uttered the words, and now stood tipsily on his feet, looking the haunted man square in the face.

"Waal, durn my boots!" the rough finally ejaculated, when he could command his speech, "ef I didn't b'lieve ye sed that as a joke, Jim-jam Joe, I—I—why I'd mount ye an' chew off yer ear!"

"Ish dot so?" Dare retorted, with a stagger and a leer. "I mean yoost vot I say—you vas a loafer und a liar, and off you come near me I plack both your eyes mid blueness."

"Ye wull, wull ye?" Haunted Hank bellowed, swinging his arms and fairly dancing with rage. "Oh! feller-citizens, d'ye hear that? D'ye want to see me pulverize that Dutchman inter powdered sassingers?"

A yell was the answer, and taking it as a signal of approval Haunted Hank leaped forward upon the mine-owner.

But Joe got a clip at him under the left ear, and with a powerful blow knocked him half-way across the room.

Springing immediately to his feet with a roar like some infuriated wild beast, the bullwhacker hurled himself once more upon the tipsy Dutchman, and they clinched, after which they performed rather an impromptu waltz around the room, and finally tumbled to the floor.

Here they rolled over and over, in a bear-like hug, biting and battering heads, until both groaned with pain.

Finally Haunted Hank got one of his hands loose, and was intently engaged in choking the life out of Joe, when a-door was dashed open, Gold-dust Dick leaped in across the room, and seized the bullwhacker about his windpipe.

"Let up!" the rough roared, "or I'll murder ye!"

"No, you won't," Gold-dust said, calmly. "It's your place to let up, and I'll give you just about the jerk of a lamb's tail to do it, or I'll shut your throttle!"

"First, my friend, allow me to arrest you, in the name of the law!" a voice cried—that of Tra-la-lee Charley, the gambler, and as he clapped his hand upon the schoolmaster's shoulders, a dozen other, did similarly with leveled revolvers.

CHAPTER V.

ROXIE TAKES A HAND IN.

"WHAT do you mean?" Richard asked, his face expressing no alarm. "One would think I were a horse-thief the way you come for me—or worse!"

"And so you are—worse!" Tra-la-lee Charley declared, triumphantly. "You're a rascal, a robber, and a blackleg, and you're going ter git yer neck stretched, ter oncet. Out wi' him, boys!"

"But, hold on hyar, boyees!" a voice cried, and Roxie Ralph burst in upon the scene. "What's the matter, heeyar? Who sez ther skulemaster must hang? I say he sha'n't!"

And the mountain waif bounded upon the top of a table, with a pair of revolvers in her hands.

The crowd stared, and several who had been disposed to see Gold-dust Dick hanged, went back and took their seats.

Roxie, though a mere child in point of size, held a powerful influence over the average Pistolvillian, for they all respected her, down to the most brutal of the roughs, and knew that she was their "child of the mines."

When danger threatened the town—when messages were to be sent—when any act requiring skill, safety, and honesty was to be performed, Roxie was ever chosen, and she had done so many daring and praiseworthy things in favor of Pistolville and her citizens, that she had come to be looked upon as a sort of guardian angel, and every one was willing to humor her whims, as a general thing.

But one man had ever shown a disposition to gainsay her right of being a general pet, and he was the sport gambler, Tra-la-lee Charley. He had ever had a dark look for her, and when she sprung upon the table in the saloon, with the light of brave resolution in her glancing orbs, an ugly expression crept into his villainous countenance.

"I'd like to know what lip you've got in this matter?" he cried, savagely. "We've found out that this schoolmaster, so-called, is a traitor to the interests of every honest, peaceably disposed citizen, and we're goin' to hang him, afore he has a chance to do any more mischief."

"Bah! I know better! Ye ain't agoin' ter do nothin' o' the kind!" Roxie declared, independently. "I reckon I know what's the matter wi' your pie. But ye needn't sweat. Miss Dora Dare is too sensible a girl to take a second thought of a galoot of your class, and, 'sides, she despises you, an' you know it. Now, then, w'at's Dick Gold-dust done, so horrible?"

"Enough!" the gambler replied. "It was found that he's been holdin' clandestine meetin's wi' our enemy, Silver Fox, the Ponca; he has also been caught lettin' masked road-agents into his shanty, an' holdin' secret confabs wi' 'em, which is clear enough that he's one on 'em!"

A grunt of approval went up from the audience. It was evident that their views coincided with those of the gambler in this respect, and they were not backward in expressing the fact, despite their respect for Roxie.

And Roxie, when she heard the murmur, looked them all over, with a steady, unflinching gaze, her face flushed with a little surprise.

Then she turned and looked at the school-master.

He, standing in the firm grasp of six sturdy miners, was, to all outward appearance, unmindful that any immediate danger threatened him. He was literally as cool as a cucumber.

Roxie saw it, and in the warmth of her ardor, could have gone over and hugged him, because he was so brave.

"Mr. Gold-dust, these charges are all false, are they not?" she asked, looking him straight in the face. "These accusations are not true of you?"

"Not to my knowledge," Gold-dust replied, quietly. "I have not the honor of the acquaintance of such a party as Silver Fox, and, as

for the other matter, it is even more a deliberate lie than the first, on the part of the man who told it!"

"Ha! you durst give me the lie!" the miner, Briggs yelled, springing forward.

"Yes, an' ye'r' a son-of-a-gun of a liar!" Roxie cried, leveling one of her pistols at him. "See nyar, Briggs, you've got a squaw and a papoose, over in Cheely, an' I'd advise ye to put on yer brakes, ef ye ever wanter see 'em. I say that et's all a put-up job, to git up a fuss wi' Gold-dust Dick, who's just as square a galoot as any o' you. What say, boys—did Rox Ralph ever lead ye afoul a snag since she's been yer pilot? Waal, I reckon not; an' now, what aire ye goin' to do—take my word that Gold-dust is all straight an' keerect, or aire ye goin' ter pedestrianize off on yer ear?"

"I opine we'll waltz off on our oracular member!" Tra-la-lee Charley remarked, with a repulsive laugh.

"Nobody addressed *you*, so shut up!" Roxie retorted. "I was speaking to those whom I've occasionally stood by an' did a good turn for."

There was no answer, further than that given by several of the miners going and taking their seats, as much as to say that they would have nothing to do in the matter.

The large majority stood firm, however, and looked sullen.

"I guess ther boyees knows their biz, fer all ther influence o' petticoats!" miner Briggs cried. "Et cropps permiscuss right out, that we won't accept o' nothin' less'n a lynch picnic, wi' sponge-cake an' bug-juice fer desserts. Still, ef et 'll let yer feelin's be any better, I opine we choose Haunted Hank ter decide ther case. Ef he sez hang-up goes ther skulemaster ter a place whar eddication never gits a grip, an' spellin'-books go ter kindle fires with. Ef he sez let him free, so be it. Eh, larkies?"

A grunt of approval came from the majority.

"Hold! I object to this! Haunted Hank is Gold-dust's enemy!" Roxie cried, "and will, of course, decide against him."

"I don't know about that!" Gold-dust said, speaking up. "I've a sort o' a notion that the Haunted is not so bad on me as that. I am perfectly willing he shall make the decision, providing he thinks of—3—of—3—of 10, and shudders."

The last words were uttered with peculiar emphasis, and the speaker's voice was altered to a deep base.

The bystanders exchanged glances—Roxie was surprised—Haunted Hank's face became ghastly in its pallor.

He looked hard at Gold-dust Dick through his bleared eyes, then shook his head strangely, and staggered toward the door.

"Et's all right, boys!" he uttered, hoarsely. "You'd better set him free!"

Then he left the saloon, and the crowd turned to gaze in wonderment at the dandy schoolmaster, miner and sport, who had had such an unmistakable influence over the proverbial "bad man" of Pistolville.

"You heard, gents," Gold-dust said, bowing. "Even my worst foe knew me, and recommended me. I dare say you will honor your own proposition."

"Yes—boys, let him go," Tra-la-lee Charley said, gruffly. "You got off well now, you devil—but you'll get your deserts yet!"

"I have no reason to doubt your word in that respect—we shall all get our deserts, soon enough," Dick replied. "And as for you, young lady, accept of my thanks for your interest in my behalf."

And, with a gallant bow, the young man walked out of the saloon.

In the wee sma' hours of that same night, when the darkness was even more intense than during the storm, a camp-fire gleamed upon the bottom of a tributary gulch opening into the main gulch, westwardly, and not more than five miles from Pistolville.

Around this camp-fire three grotesque figures were lounging—figures of the shape of men, but clad to the eyes in one undivided costume, each of the furry part of buffalo-skins, giving them a shaggy and frightful appearance. What of the features above the eyes was not covered by the singular gown, was bidden by the frontispiece of fur caps. For some time these strange beings lounged upon the ground and smoked in supreme silence, the weird whistle of the wind through the ravine being the only sound to break the monotony.

Finally footsteps brought a fourth individual to the light of the camp-fire, and this in turn brought the lounging nondescripts to their feet, and they gathered around him.

The new-comer in dress differed from the others, in that the shaggy hair was of much greater thickness and length, and of a jetty black color.

He was also slightly shorter, and heavier set, and evidently a person of great strength.

"Well!" he said, in a hoarse voice; "I see thou art back to the picket camp-fire of Black Hand the White Aztec. What didst learn in the camp of the pale-face miner, concerning thy errand thither?"

"Thy Excellency will not be pleased, I fear, for we were able to learn little or nothing," one of the nondescripts broke in. "The pale-face bravo is an Eastern man, and not the one thou hath expected. His sobriquet is Gold-dust Dick."

"A bravo he is then?"

"Ay, even so. He can at will hold a dozen ruffians at bay, if so he chooseth, and the power of his arm hath fury."

"Perhaps he would serve me as well. Thou didst not tell me his vocation, Emanuel?"

"No—he is an enigma, thy Excellency. He came unto Pistolville a schoolmaster, but latterly has taken to mining. That he had some underlying motive in coming to Pistolville, is evident, but what it was or is, I am not prepared to declare to thee."

"Then, we will not away to our silent city, at once, for thy words impress me with a belief that the handsome sport may be of use to us."

When day again dawned over Pistolville, Gold-dust Dick was up ahead of the sun, and after dispatching a breakfast of venison and corn-bread and molasses, and changing his attire

tire to his rough working garments, he set forth to his placer diggin's, a few rods distant.

A system of sluice-boxes ran through his claim, of which he had the first advantages for "wash," being near the falls, and getting clear water in suitable quantities. And then, too, he did not have a strong yield, requiring much power.

The dirt of his claim was a soft sandy surface, and not hard to dig, and on an average yielded about fifteen cents to the pan, and therefore, though not getting rich, he managed to pan out three to five dollars per day, without much trouble.

It was a splendid sunny morning, after the storm of the preceding night, and the birds were singing merrily from perches upon the neighboring bushes and projecting crags, as if overjoyed at the victory of the miner-bravo, of the previous night.

And he had put in a couple of hours of steady work, and was just engaged in "washing" a pan of dirt, when he heard light footsteps, and turned to find Roxie standing near by, leaning upon a rifle she carried.

"'Mornin'!" she saluted with a roguish grin. "How strives the busy little bee, to improve each shinin' 'pan'? How goes it—rich dirt?"

"Nothing to brag of, you may rest assured," Dick replied, pausing in his work. "Just about enough to live and kill time, you see."

"Humph! what's yer object? I don't work, an' I've got lots o' rocks, too. Now an' then I 'buck the tiger,' an' make a raise, an' then I'm heeled, for a time."

"Indeed! Well, I seldom gamble, myself, unless dared, or I see a worthy object. Pleasant morning."

"Bet yer life, an' I'm off after a few birds. By the way, aire ye goin' to marry Dora Dare?"

"Marry Dora Dare? What put that into your head?"

"Oh, I reckoned you'd get struck on her purty face and refined manners, that's all, an' thought ef the circus war booked immegetly, I'd invite myself ter be present."

"Ha! ha! Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, for I've made no calculations upon such a thing, and there is just as much prospect of my marrying you as there is of my wedding Miss Dare."

"Pshaw! you wouldn't have such a harum-scarum little wild-cat as I am, would you?" and the waif's eyes fairly glistened in their earnestness.

"Well, if I were matrimonially inclined, I don't know why you wouldn't fill the bill. But what do you think is the influence working against me here?"

"Before answerin' that question let me ask you another: were you wanted to come here to Pistolvile—that is, were you sent for?"

Gold-dust Dick looked surprised.

"Why?" he asked, toying with his mustache and eying her sharply.

"No matter; I've axed you a square question—answer it or not, just as you choose."

"Well, yes. I was sent for. I was down at Chicopee, near Shasta, when I received an unsigned letter, telling me that if I would come to Pistolvile I would learn something peculiarly and pecuniarily to my interest. Being of a dis-

position to corral in all the shekels available, I at once set out for this place, not knowing for what particular purpose I was wanted, nor am I any better apprised now. Do you know?"

"Well, I ain't able to tell you nothin', fer I ain't figgered et thr'u' my head, but by little mites I've picked up an' consolidated now an' then, I hev arriv' at ther conclusion that ther powerful bad element, that holds a full hand hereabouts, wanted a man, and wanted him purty bad, at that, and you seem to be ther man."

"Think so?"

"I do! Moreover, I've just found out who you are. You're ther feller as many a miner up North has heard of—you are the famous road-agent, *Deadwood Dick*."

CHAPTER VI.

A MUCH SOUGHT-FOR MAN.

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of the miner-schoolmaster, he could hardly have shown a greater expression of surprise than he did at the declaration of Roxie.

"I Deadwood Dick?" he articulated, taking off his sombrero and scratching his head. "Well, well—you seem to be off your reckoning for once. What makes you think that?"

"Oh! I surmised it from things I've seen and heard. Besides, you bear a striking resemblance to the famous outlaw."

"Pshaw! Resemblances often get one into a deuce of a scrape. Sorry, too, I can't agree with you about my being Deadwood Dick. He was a man, who, in the flush of his wild career, I had quite a liking for, because of many of his manly qualities. Latterly he has passed out of notice, I think, or at least I have seldom heard his name made a topic of public conversation. So you think Deadwood Dick was the *called* man, eh?"

"I allow. I don't know just the reason, neither. But good-day. I'll bring you back a partridge for your supper, maybe."

And then she turned away and walked up the gulch beyond the falls, finally disappearing from view.

Gold-dust Dick finished his day's work without again seeing her, and panned out quite a little handful of the shining flakes. Putting this "dust" into a little pouch, he shouldered his pick and shovel and trudged away toward his shanty, glad the hard day's labor was over.

When he arrived at his unpretentious residence he found Miss Dare sitting on the doorstep.

"Excuse me," she said, rising with a smile—a very winning smile, too, it struck Richard—"but have you seen anything of my father? He has not been home since late in the afternoon yesterday, and I am very much worried about him."

"I saw him last night," Dick replied; "in truth, saved him from a choking at the hands of Haunted Hank. Perhaps he has got full and is taking a snooze in some out-of-the-way place?"

"Oh! no, no! I fear some harm has come to him. Are you sure you have not seen him since last night?"

"Quite sure, lady. I wouldn't be alarmed if

I were you, because in all probability he will turn up all safe when you are least expecting him. If you desire I will make some inquiries for him."

"If you will be so kind I shall feel very grateful, sir. I am already under many obligations to you, for interrupting a game between him and Tra-la-lee Charley a few nights ago."

"You know I promised to do what I could for you, and I happened in upon the game just in time to adjourn it by inducing Mr. Dare to come with me, much to the rage and chagrin of the patent rascal whom you call Tra-la-lee Charley, who already has a pretty large share of your father's wealth gambled away from him. But how did you find it out?"

"Father told me, and, as usual, promised that he would straighten up and do better—but alas! when he gets where there is liquor his promises are all forgotten."

"I am sorry such is the case. True, he is strongly wedded to drink, and it will probably take a strong shock of some kind to brace him up. I will search for him, however, this evening and talk seriously to him if I find him."

"Thank you. You are a good man and take a load of sorrow from my mind," Miss Dare said, and then, bowing, turned away—to hide tearful eyes, Richard Gold-dust half suspected, as he watched her till other shanties hid her from view.

According to his promise, that night, after partaking of his supper, Gold-dust betook himself into the town to look for old Joe Dare.

What had become of the old vagabond he of course had no idea, but for the young lady's sake he resolved to make some inquiries.

It was just dark when he left his shanty, and lighting a pipe he sauntered along, not thinking of danger, and without fear of it should it be ambushed all around him.

He reached the main business part of the camp without incident, and seeing a crowd around the post-office, dropped in, out of curiosity, for he had no expectation of getting any mail.

'Most all of the miners and roughs who had been at the saloon the previous night were also lounging about now, and the glances they sent at the handsome schoolmaster were not of the most friendly character.

Paying no attention to this, Richard passed on and took his place in file behind a number of men ahead of him, inquiring for mail.

As before stated, he had no reason to suppose he would receive any mail, but resolved to inquire, more by way of killing time than anything else.

And to his great surprise, when he asked for mail for Richard Gold-dust, the little shriveled-up old postmaster gazed at him sharply through his blue goggles, and handed out three ordinary-looking letters.

A glance at the directions showed that two of them were directed to Richard Gold-dust, Esq., while the third was addressed to *Deadwood Dick*.

Turning to the postmaster instantly, he said, in a voice loud enough to be heard through the room:

"There is evidently a mistake, here, sir, as one of the letters you gave me is directed to

Deadwood Dick, and belongs to that party, whoever he may be!"

And then he walked haughtily away from the window, to a quiet part of the room, to read his letters.

On the way, he passed Tra-la-lee Charley, on whose face was a malicious smile, although he refrained from speaking out his evil thoughts, whatever they might have been.

"That fellow is a rascal and a scoundrel!" was the thought that immediately popped into Gold-dust's mind, only to pop out again, as he opened his letters.

The first one he opened he found to his astonishment, was in a feminine style of chirography, and a glance at the appended signature still more astonished him.

The missive was signed "Dora Dare."

Of the letter itself there were but a few words, as follows:

"DEAR MR. GOLD-DUST:—

"I am almost sorry I ever met you, for I—I—but, no, I will not be so foolish! Yours, DORA DARE."

If this man Richard Gold-dust—this combination of bravo, sport, miner and gentleman—gave vent to a prolonged whistle of surprise, as he finished the note, and returned it to its envelope, he was pardonable.

The color in his cheeks had become heightened, and the expression upon his whole face and in his eyes was such as no person well could define or unravel.

"Poor fool—poor silly, passion-ruled child!" he muttered, the kindly light in his eyes hardening a little. "She might have as well written all that prompted her to write those few words. The deuce! I'm in a confounded fine predicament now! I'll be shot if I ain't; and what to do I don't know, unless I repulse her, and that would be worse, no doubt, than were I to strike her a blow in the face. But, first of all, let's see from whom this other letter comes!"

He tore it open impatiently, wondering the while if it would bring as much undesirable news as the first had done. No! not exactly bad news, did it bring, but it was a strange letter, something like a romance it seemed to him:

"SILENT CITY, ——, 18—.

"RICHARD GOLD-DUST:—

"Thou must have read of the tribe of Aztec, who, though now nearly extinct, were once powerful, and whose great achievements left eternal emblems of their former existence in the wild regions of the great West—upon the picture rocks in the deep canyons—in the buried subterranean cities which the pale-face explorers are year by year unearthing?

"And yet the last of the Aztecs is not! In Silent City there yet dwell a few of the once powerful race of savages, alone in their solitude and boundless wealth, with Black Hand, the White Aztec, at their head. Their days however are not many, nor are those of their chief. And in their last days, when their ability for warfare is gone—when peace and quiet are all they seek, a blood-thirsty red brother threatens an invasion, in order to get possession of their mines and their gold—the accumulations of untold generations.

"In fear and trembling they appeal to Black Hand for the protection he is not able to give them, and he warns them of the worst to expect, and advises them to take a new and younger chief, who shall bring with him not to exceed a dozen sturdy, moral

and honest pale-faces, and protect the Aztecs and their otherwise doomed city from the attack of the red scourge of the Sierras, Silver Fox the Ponca—they to eventually inherit the last life-camps of the Aztecs, and all they leave behind.

"To this the Aztec braves unanimously agreed, and left it for Black Hand to choose their new chief. Black Hand set to work to recall the trusty bordermen he had met and heard of when a brother pale-face, and after thinking of them all, considering their faults, and weighing the balance, he chose of all men to fill the chieftaincy, yourself—*Deadwood Dick, alias Richard Gold-dust*, and sent for you. Thou hast come—thou knowest thy offered fortune—thou hast no choice in life but to accept. Emissaries of mine even now lurk within thy vision, didst thou but know it, and if thou wilt honor the offer of a people, go forth into the night, bareheaded, and thou wilt be met, and guided to my camp.

"BLACK HAND, the White Aztec!"

That was all, but was enough.

As much as Gold-dust Dick had been surprised at the receipt of Dora Dare's strange letter, it was nothing compared with the astonishment which assailed him, at reading the strange communication of the Aztec chief.

"I'm blowed if I ain't tangled up, and fogged, for once!" he muttered, as he turned to leave the store, in which the post-office was situated.

As he was passing where Tra-la-lee Charley was idly leaning against a box, the same mocking smile was upon the villain's face, and gleaming, evil light in his eyes.

"Ha! ha! Did you get a letter from some forsaken wife?" he demanded, sneeringly. "I thought your expression seemed to indicate that you were brooding over family troubles!"

"Presumably you were wrong, and it will be well for you to mind your own business!" Gold-dust retorted.

He would have passed on then, only that the gambler again opened fire:

"Oh! you needn't be so pert and saucy, because no one is afraid of you, my suspected Adonis!" he said fiercely. "I dare say if you was to show up them letters, we'd all be a peg wiser as to your past an' present."

"Then maybe you'd like to undertake the job of possessing them?" Gold-dust cried, turning upon him so suddenly, that, rough and used to rough life as he was, the gamester flinched. "I've a notion to give you a thrashing, you low-lived cur!"

Not a word said Tra-la-lee Charley back. He knew that the schoolmaster was immeasurably his superior both in strength and quickness, and he was wise enough to play quiet.

"Your wisdom saves you, as far as it goes!" Dick said, turning away in contempt; and leaving the place he went at once to his shanty, where to have quiet to ponder over the substance of the communications he had received; but to his surprise, on arriving there he found a candle lit, upon the table, and two persons sitting on either side of it.

Hardly knowing what to make of the visitation, he paused in the doorway, and surveyed the scene.

One of the parties was an Indian chief of advanced years, whose body above the belt was barren of clothing and grotesquely besmeared with war-paint, as was his face, giving him an appearance far more hideous than handsome.

A belt about his waist contained a revolver, tomahawk and scalping-knife, while his scalp-lock was stuck full of nodding plumes.

It needed but a glance to tell that he was a stern old sinner, while in the face of his companion there was nothing of the stern or brutal expression.

She was a maiden of some seventeen summers, with a finely molded figure, indicative of agility and strength, while her features were round and of Anglo-Saxon cast, instead of the flat shape peculiar to the Poncas, and her eyes large, dusky and lustrous. Her hair was of great abundance, and fell below her waist in a sheeny, rippling wave.

She was attired in a modern-style suit made of buckskin, the skirt reaching to within a few inches of her ankles, and the whole costume being the most elaborately braided and beaded affair Gold-dust had ever seen, many of the buttons and ornaments being gold.

Indeed, all in all, she was the prettiest Indian maiden he had ever seen.

As they saw Gold-dust standing upon the threshold, both the chief and the maiden arose.

"Fear not to enter your own wigwam, pale-face brave!" the red-skin said. "Silver Fox, the Ponca, and his princess, Starlight, seek you not except in friendship. We found pale-face absent, and so made bold to enter and await his return."

"So I perceive, and presumably the Silver Fox and his daughter are welcome, as long as their motives are good," Richard replied, entering and closing the door, after which he seated himself near the fire-place and lit his pipe.

"And now, red-skin, what might you want?"

"Silver Fox comes at the instance of his pet and only child, Starlight!" the old chief said, gravely. "Starlight berry smart girl—well educated, and know heap about pale-faces and their ways. Starlight want pale-face husband, and tell Silver Fox that no red-man ebber do her. So she see Gold-dust Dick and choose him for her great brave to succeed Silver Fox as chief of the Poncas, when he die. What has the pale-face to say?"

"Well, nothing to speak of, more than that I don't calculate to hitch to any female property just at present; and, besides that, Indian girls ain't in my line, allowin' yours is pretty and good enough for any man!" was the reply Richard Gold-dust vouchsafed.

CHAPTER VII.

CARDS VS. THE VOLCANO.

NOT every man of Pistolville would have given the Ponca chief the answer that Gold-dust Dick did—it is doubtful if they would have dared, for Silver Fox never forgot a slight or an injury, but cherished and nurtured it until his mind's eye magnified it large enough to be worthy of his vengeance.

"Pale-face brave great fool!" he said, in a tone that was by no means pleasant. "Starlight is the pride of her nation, and great warriors bow at her feet. Chiefs of all the red tribes of the West have sought her, but she has refused them all, and never met her choice until

her eyes a few days since, rested upon Gold-dust Dick. Then she told Silver Fox of the great vein where the hopes of her life were located, and willed it that Silver Fox should come to the pale-face Bravo and intercede in her behalf, and Silver Fox came. The heart of Starlight, Princess of the Poncas, belongs to the pale-face, and to him alone. Let the pale-face therefore, reflect before refusing her. The marriage will make him second chief. The Poncas are about to attack another weak-handed nation, the remnant of the Aztecs, who have heaps of gold stored up in their silent lodges in the depths of the wilderness. Many scalps and much riches will reward the Poncas. If Gold-dust Dick becomes the husband of Starlight, he shall lead the attack!"

"Thanks for your magnanimous offers, my noble chief, but I am in duty bound to refuse them," the miner said, calmly. "I appreciate your compliment, but have reasons for not wishing to accede to your proposition."

"What reasons?"

"Reasons of my own, which I prefer to keep to myself."

"Ugh! Then the pale-face refuses to do honor to the Poncas?"

"Yes, I reckon that's about the size of it," Dick answered.

"Then pale-face Dick shall live to regret it, same as other dogs in Pistolville," the chief cried, fiercely, as he arose to depart. "Silver Fox has sworn vengeance upon the pale-face miners, and his curse rests on you also."

"Much obliged—come again!" Dick replied, as the two departed.

After a minute he broke into a hearty laugh:

"A good chance, that, for a man who wants a lift, but the prospects are that I shall never be adopted in a red-skin family, at least while there is a chance for me to do anything else."

Later that night Tra-la-lee Charley left the Bourbon Saloon, and went forth into the darkness, still smarting under the effect of the rebuff of Gold-dust Dick.

"Curses on the fellow!" he muttered. "His devilish coolness and impudence fire me 'most to madness. If I don't in some way manage to ring in a cold deal on him before long it's pretty certain he'll do me harm, for it's plain he has no love for me, and, what's more, I've a half of a notion that he—"

He did not conclude his muttered soliloquy, for at this same instant there was a collision between him and some other person, going in the opposite direction, and both sat unceremoniously back upon the ground.

"Hold on! hello! what the—" the gambler began.

"Yes, v'ot der' duyfel vas der matter mit you?" roared the voice of Dutch Joe, through the darkness. "Who you vas? V'at you take me vor, all der v'ile?"

"I'll show you, you whisky-soaked sour-kraut!" Tra-la-lee Charley growled, rising dolefully from a puddle of water, into which he had fallen. "Why don't you git out of a fellow's path, instead of lumbering up like a great grizzly bear? You've ruined the seat of my pantaloons, you souker."

"Oh! dot don'd vas of some account. Der

Volcano was good for more as one pair pritches," Joe returned, good-naturedly. "Vere you goin', Dra-la-loo Sharley?"

"Where you'd better be going—home," the gambler growled.

"Oh! ish dot so? Vel, den I vil go home mit you, too. I haff got pizness mit you, Sharley."

"What business?"

"Vel, I tolle you. You vin haff der Volcano avay mit me, und got me drinking like a cod-fish. Somedings vas got to be done mit me. I play you von game. Uff I lose der rest off der mine, I make oud der papers for you, und go commit suicide. Uff I vin pack vot you vin off me, avile ago, I brace up, not drink or gamble some more, und pe mineself again."

"Pshaw! don't be a fool, Dare. I don't want the rest of your mine, and you'd better keep what interest you've got, rather than to venture losing the rest."

"Und I don'd vant you to haff no pizness around the mine, Dra-la-loo Sharley, und so I own der whole, or nothing."

"Well, have it your own way. I'll step back and get Lawyer Javil, so that if you lose, he can draw up a deed at once, for you to sign."

"Dot is righd. Uff I got beat, I sign. Uff you got beat, I giff you swi'ours to gid oud off der town. Go git der lawyer, und I wait for you here."

With a repressed chuckle the gambler hurried back toward the Bourbon saloon, but soon returned, accompanied by a villainous-looking miner, who looked better prepared to cut throats than to do legal work.

The three men then set out for the gambler's little shanty, which had been hastily put together inside of a week, and was tenanted by its owner when he was not elsewhere, manipulating the pasteboards.

They soon arrived, and entered, and Tra-la-lee Charley fastened the door after him, so that no one need intrude.

There was but one lower apartment to the shanty, and the furniture consisted of a couple of ordinary deal-tables, four chairs, a cot bed, and a cumbersome old chest, in one corner. Light was furnished by a lantern suspended from the ceiling.

As soon as the trio were seated, the gambler said:

"Mr. Javil, you may draw up a legal deed, wherein Joseph Dare, for the consideration of half a million dollars already received, deeds to me, Charles Guthrie, all right, title and interest in the Volcano Mine."

"Mr. Dare and I will then play a game of eucher, and if he wins, the deed is to be torn up, unsigned, and I am no longer to claim an interest in the mine. On the contrary, if he loses, I am, by his signing the deed, to become sole owner of the mine. You understand?"

"Perfectly!" the lawyer answered, and producing paper, pen and ink, proceeded to write.

In the course of twenty minutes he had completed the form of the deed, ready for signing, and read it aloud.

"Yaw, dot ish right!" Dutch Joe asserted, when he had finished. "Und, now, misder lawyer, I vant you to stand py, und see dot all is

fair play mit der game. Shuffle up der cards, Tra-la-lee Sharley!"

The cards were shuffled, cut and dealt, and the game began, each player fully alive to the play instead of Joe's being sleepy, as was usually the case.

But alas! the fates were against him, and a groan fairly burst from his lips, as Tra-la-lee Charley finally brought his fist down upon the table with terrific force, with a significant chuckle, as a signal that he had won.

"The Volcano is mine, Dutchy," he said, leering across the table, into Dare's face. "You were a fool that you did not take my advice and keep it, when you could. Sign that deed!"

Dare stared at the document that was shoved in front of him, a strange gleam in his eyes.

"I don'd vas know better I do dot, or no," he returned. "Uff you say I must, dot's der very time you makes a misdake. I vas like a hog—I don'd vas drive vorth a cent; und den der is no compulsory law regarding paying gambling debts."

"There is a law of *death* here in the mines for those who flunk!" the gambler hissed, drawing a revolver; "and you're too shrewd a man to trifl with me, Joe Dare. And then, you are too honorable to go back on your word."

"Yas, dot vas true. I nefer go pack mit v'ot I say—dot's all v'ot makes me sign dot deed."

He seized the pen and drew the document toward him, but the gambler checked him with an oath.

"Hold on! your signature must be witnessed. What the deuce has become of Javil!"

For some reason unexplainable, just then the lawyer had suddenly made himself scarce, that is to say, he had unlocked the door, and left the shanty without being noticed by either gambler or Dare.

"Cursed queer where he went to, so suddenly," the former growled, going to the door, and peering out into the night. "I say, hello, Javil!"

But Javil evidently did not see fit to halloo back, for there was no response to the gambler's shout.

"Dot's all righd. Id is yoost der same uff I sign it, as dough he see me," he said. "You frightened him off mit der pistol. Now, yoost you giff me a receipt in full for all I owe you—say ten dollars! und den I sign dis deed!"

"If you don't sign it I'll murder you!" was the savage answer, as Tra-la-lee Charley once more sat down at the table, and seizing a pen, ink and paper, hastily wrote out the required receipt and flung it to Dare.

"But I don'd giff you der chance. See! I sign my name—Joseph Dare. There! It vas all gone now, my property, und to-morrow I go to work at miner's wages, a wiser fool den I haff been heretofore."

And, finishing his signature as he spoke, the misguided man rose from the table, and staggered out of the shanty.

Tra-la-lee Charley closed and barred the door after him; then sat down once more at the table, his face triumphant in its expression.

"It's mine now, fair and square, and I'll take the first opportunity to have this deed recorded, thereby making things safe, beyond peradven-

ture. Ha! ha! I have not profited so badly by coming to Pistolville, after all. The Volcano Mine isn't picked up in value every day!"

"No, nor it won't profit you to any great extent for many a day to come!" a voice suddenly cried.

The gambler uttered an oath, and looked in the direction whence came the sound.

The lid of the old chest was thrown open, and standing upright and erect, within the odd receptacle, was Gold-dust Dick, a cool, dangerous glitter in his handsome eyes, and a pair of cocked "five"-shooters in his grasp.

"You?" Tra-la-lee Charley gasped, flushing and paling alternately.

"Exactly! Individually and collectively, I!" the miner said, with emphasis. "I overheard the proposed game, and took it into my head to be present. The Volcano Mine is not yours, Charles Guthrie.

"You lie! It is mine!" the gambler retorted, seizing the deed, and thrusting it into his pocket.

"I insist that it is not, and I will proceed to explain why. I came here, well knowing that you never would let Dare win back that which you had gambled away from him. Again, I came here to play you a game for that Volcano Mine myself!"

"By no means. I'll not play with you," Tra-la-lee Charley growled.

"Oh, yes, you will!" the other reassured, triumphantly. "You dare not refuse, for you know I'd just as lieve shoot you as look at you—and shoot you I should, if you did not play with me."

"But what have you to stake against the Volcano?" was the gruff demand.

"Something I know you covet—my life!" Gold-dust replied. "Between us, it is no secret that we cordially dislike each other. Ere long one or the other of us will probably drop. So I'll give you a chance to win the drop on me, or I win the mine."

"Pshaw, man, you are mad!"

"Oh, no—not a bit of it. I know my business. It's either your life or mine; you must play for mine, or I'll take yours. Go to work, now, and write a transfer assignment of the deed to me. Then we will play. No mulishness, now, or it will prove fatal to you, let me assure you!"

Tra-la-lee Charley hesitated several minutes, his gaze riveted sullenly upon the floor.

But he finally seized the pen and proceeded to obey Gold-dust's stern command.

It took him but a few moments to complete the work, being a rapid writer.

Gold-dust Dick looked on, as he wrote, and when he had finished, took a seat on the opposite side of the table.

"Now, then, fetch out a fresh pack, and we'll play!" he said, sternly. "If I lose, you shall have one of my pistols, and shoot me. If I win, you shall sign that deed, and also give me the one Dare signed, or you're a dead man. Remembering that I am watching you, narrowly, it will pay you not to make any sly moves, as I'll drop you, if you do!"

The gambler did not answer, but his face was dark with passion.

The cards were produced, shuffled, cut, and dealt, and the game began.

In just seven minutes by the clock, which hung over the fire-place, the game was played and won.

And Gold-dust Dick was the winner!

"Curse on you," Guthrie hissed. "You'll pay for this!"

"Not this evening!" the imperturbable miner sport replied. "Have the goodness to sign that assignment, and hand it over. No monkeying, now!"—for the enraged rascal evidently wanted to draw a pistol from his belt.

He desisted, however, and signed the assignment of the deed, and handed it to Gold-dust.

"Thank you!" Dick said. "When I get to working the Volcano, come around and maybe you can hire out to buck your head against quartz, as a crusher."

Then, with his revolvers in hand, and a victorious smile on his face, he backed out of the shanty, and was gone!

After his departure, Tra-la-lee Quarley spent an hour in drinking and swearing, as relief for his injured feelings, and was just preparing to turn in, for the night, when Haunted Hank thrust his head in at the door.

"Come!" he said, sententiously.

"Why?" the gambler demanded.

"Because, the fruit can be plucked, now, in good condition!"

Tra-la-lee's face brightened, and arming himself, thoroughly, he followed the bullwhacker toward the post-office.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPING DICK.

THROUGH the darkness of the night, the two men of similar brutish natures, hurried toward the village store, which also constituted the post-office.

It was a large, long, log structure, with a rear and front entrance, and a couple of windows in one side, which were now closed in by heavy shutters.

Haunted Hank led the way to the rear entrance, with cautious footsteps, which Tra-la-lee Charley imitated, as best he knew how, for despite his cumbersome size, the elder ruffian was the better trailer.

Kneeling upon the door-sill, Hadden peered in through the keyhole a few seconds—then motioned for Tra-la-lee Charley to do the same.

The apartment within the door was used as the inner part of the post-office, where mails were assorted and distributed into the number of pigeon-holes facing into the front part of the store.

The only other furniture was a table, stool, stove and lamp, the latter now being lighted.

At the table, upon which were many letters spread out, stood a man of erect figure, clad in black garments, with a similar colored cloak flung around his shoulders, and a black sombrero pinned up on one side, upon his head.

His face from forehead to chin, was hidden behind a black mask.

He was actively engaged in examining the directions upon the envelopes, as if searching for some particular address.

"See!" Haunted Hank grunted. "He's archin' fer a letter w'at belongs to him, an' he's Deadwood Dick, w'at the letter cum for, ter-night."

"Yes, and I fancy I recognize the figure!" Tra-la-lee Charley replied, in an undertone. "Be it Deadwood Dick, or whoever, it is also Gold-dust Dick."

"On course, an' they're one an' the same—I know'd that, quite a bit ago."

"Curse the fellow, how I hate him; and now for my revenge. Go get a half a dozen of the boys while I stay on guard—quickly and cautiously now."

"All right!" Hadden replied; "and ye kin bet yer boots I'll stay away till arter Deadwood Dick is caged."

This latter conclusion, however, was uttered after he was well out of the hearing of Tra-la-lee Charley.

After he was gone, the gambler crouched upon the doorstep, and watched his intended victim narrowly through the keyhole.

"He's mine now, and he'll never get a deal in on me again!" he hissed between his clinched teeth. "When he comes out, we'll nab him, and he'll get lynch law, if I've got anything to say about the matter."

Deadwood Dick (whom the reader has probably already detected in his alias of Gold-dust Dick) soon after found the letter he was looking for, and tore it open eagerly, unaware that he was watched; for he had calculated that the Pistolvillians were all in bed when he effected his entrance to the post-office for the purpose of getting possession of the letter which he had refused earlier in the evening.

The letter ran as follows:

"DEADWOOD DICK:—

"It is known that you are in Pistolvile, and the sheriff has received orders from the authorities to arrest you and bring you to the nearest military post for trial for your many depredations, years since. Take the advice of a friend, and lose yourself in some out-of-the-way place, where the name of Deadwood Dick is not known.

JOHN DUNN.

"Humph! circumstances are coming along faster than I anticipated," Dick muttered to himself, as he tore the letter into fragments. "Let me see? John Dunn was formerly a member of one of my Deadwood bands. Well, I'll think over his proffered advice at leisure."

Then, turning out the lamp, he unlocked the rear door and stepped outside.

All was utter blackness, at this, the darkest hour before the dawn.

The rear door of the post-office opened into an alley between two buildings, which had to be traversed several rods before reaching the street.

Though he did not have any idea that danger menaced him, Gold-dust (as we shall still call him) was cautious enough to take a sharp glance at his surroundings before leaving the door-step.

Seeing nothing, he started on his way out of the alley, at a rapid gait, when to his consternation he suddenly tripped over a rope which was drawn across the alley, and fell flat upon the ground.

Ere he could make a move to rise, half a

dozen burly men had pounced upon him, and though he struggled with superhuman power to rise and overthrow them, they at last succeeded in binding him hand and foot.

He was then carried out of the alley into the main street, and laid upon the ground again, while his captors crowded around him and gazed down upon him in triumph.

"Ha! ha!" Tra-la-lee Charley cried, sarcastically. "Who has won the game, finally, my gay schoolmaster? I told you I'd pay you off, and here you see yourself, your mask of deceit torn off, and you a helpless prisoner."

"Oh, I'm very comfortable!" Dick replied, with ironic composure. "When I get otherwise I'll inform you."

"Will you, though? Well, I opine, about the most immediate relief you'll get, will be when you're swingin' to a rope. Say, boys, shall we boost him?"

"I reckon that ain't fer us to say," a miner declared. "Ha'nted Hank is our 'mayor, jedge an' court,' an' we ginerally go as he sez."

"You bet we do," added a chorus of bystanders, of whom there were by this time a score, and more coming.

"But, see here!" Tra-la-lee Charley protested — "this is all nonsense. This fellow is a mail-robber, a road-agent, and a cut-throat; and, moreover, he holds a clinch onto Haunted Hank, so that your noble commander dare not say his soul's his own! You all saw how he weakened the other night? Now, ef you're goin' to depend on *him* for justice, you ain't a-goin' to do a thing wi' this outlaw, but let him go an' do as he pleases."

"Mebbe ye'd like ter step in an' fill Haunted Hank's boots," one digger growled, with a sneer.

"Of course he would," added another. "He's got an idea he owns the town, beca'se he's interested in the Volcano."

"And he is no longer even interested in that," Gold-dust said, "as I hold a deed from Dare to him, and an assignment from him to me!"

"Then, w'at ye so big-feelin', fer?" another miner chipped in. "We allow ef ye keep yer snoot out, we kin run ther town, ourselves, wi' Ha'nted Hank's help. Ef Hank sez et ain't fair ter send ther prisoner up ter Ingersolville, I opine the majority o' ther b'yees 'll stick by him."

And the murmur of assent that followed, seemed to indicate that the speaker was not "off" in his reckoning.

"I've got an ijeer," said still another miner. "Let's call a meetin' tew order, an' take a vote whether we try Gold-dust Dick immegetly on our own hooks, an' give him the benefit o' ther jury's verdict, or put him in a lock-up, an' send fer ther sheriff or marshal to cum an' hand him over ter ther reg'lar courts. What d'ye say?"

A shout of approval went up.

So Haunted Hank was sent for, and preparations were made to hold the election there and then, by building campfires, and providing torches.

Haunted Hank was forthcoming, soon after, and was elected poll-tender, by unanimous consent.

The "polls" was a cigar-box with the lid nailed down, and a slit cut in the top, so that slips of paper could be put in through it.

The men were then told to each prepare a slip of paper, and to write either "At Once" or "Reprieve," upon each slip, according as to whether they wanted Gold-dust Dick tried at once, or handed over to the U. S. deputy marshal, when he should arrive.

"Recollect, gentlemen," cried Charley, "your best way is to have the trial, conviction and lynch pic-nic, at once, fer ef yer lock up sech a slippery cuss as this hyar Deadwood Dick, in a tight cast-iron cage, ten to one he'll crawl out through a flaw-hole in the iron, an' escape. Ther best way is to make sure of him while you've got him."

But it was plainly not the intention of the crowd to profit largely by the directions of the gambler, for he had "bitten" too many of them at cards to be popular among them, aside from his highly officious every-day demeanor.

And therefore they prepared their slips of paper pretty much as pleased themselves.

Some hesitated and deliberated on the matter, while others took no time for decison.

In order to have a square vote, men were dispatched for such of the miners as had not been aroused from their slumbers, not knowing anything of the nocturnal demonstration out in the street. And inside of an hour every man had voted except two, and they were Tra-la-lee Charley and old Joe Dare.

The former insisted on polling the last vote.

Dare soon came reeling along, at an unsteady gait, his hands thrust in his pockets, and his mouthed wreathed in a tipsy grin.

"Vel, poys, v'ot is der matter?" he asked with a hiccough. "You got somedings important?"

"Yes, we have, Joe," Tra-la-lee Charley proposed. "We've just arrested Gold-dust Dick, alias Deadwood Dick, the ruffian who has been insulting your daughter. We caught him robbing the mails, and we're takin' a vote to see whether we shall give him a hasty trial and string him up at once, or hold him a prisoner, until a deputy marshal can come and take charge of his nibs; and we want your vote."

"Ish dot so? Und you vant me to vote so dot Gold-dust Dick got hung right avay off?"

"Yes. If you are in favor of a speedy trial, write upon a blank slip of paper 'At Once.' If you wish the marshal to have the prisoner, write upon the paper, 'Reprieve,' and put it, in either case, in yonder box."

"Vel, I vote for 'Reprieve', den," Dutch Joe said. "Gold-dust Dick don'd vas do me some injury, und I vote for him."

Accordingly he penciled 'Reprieve' upon a slip of paper that was given him, and deposited it in the box.

"Now, then, you vote, and that is all," Haunted Hank said, addressing Tra-la-lee Charley.

"Yes, I'll vote, and I fancy my vote will bring on an immediate trial!" the villain replied with a significant laugh, as he stepped toward the polls.

"Stop!" cried a clear, ringing voice, and who should come forward but Dora Dare. "Stop, I

say! Gentlemen, if you will take pains to examine, you will find out that Tra-la-lee Charley has a number of 'At Once' tickets in his hands, which he intends to drop into the box!"

Instantly the gambler was pounced upon, and his clinched hands forced open.

It was as Dora had said. In his right hand he clutched a package of papers, so placed together as to look like one, and in number there were ten.

A cry of indignation escaped the crowd at this attempted act of treachery, and the miners who held the gambler of one accord hurled him to the ground.

For a moment he lay like one dead, but he soon recovered from the shock, and with difficulty regained his feet.

"Now, you git!" Haunted Hank yelled, whipping out a revolver—"git, I say, right out o' this hyar town, as fast as yeou know how. I opine I don't allow no sich varmints ter play cheat around hyar, 'long's I'm boss, an' ef I ever ketch ye in this valley again, darn me fer a dragon ef I ain't goin' ter fill yer carcass so full o' lead ye'll answer fer a block o' sodder. Git!"

"You mean it?" Tra-la-lee Charley cried, his face flaming with rage.

"Jest linger hyarabouts an' see fer yerself!" was Haunted Hank's reply, with emphasis of significance.

"Then I will go—but my curses rest on you, girl, and you'll feel the effects of them!" he cried shaking his fist at Dora. Then he walked away with curses upon his lips, and a look of incarnate hatred upon his face.

"Here! hold on vonce in avile! Don'd you vas make threats apoud mine gal, Dora, or so helb me, I smash your skull inside out!" Dutch Joe yelled after him, doubling up his fists in great bravado.

But if Tra-la-lee Charley heard, he heeded not, and was quickly hidden from view in the darkness.

After he was gone, Haunted Hank restored his revolver to its usual place, and looked the crowd over.

"Waal, gents, aire all ther votes in?" he demanded. "Fer, if so, we'll proceed to count them!"

"No!" Dora cried, advancing. "I claim a right to cast a vote in this matter, and here it is. Are you all willing I should, gentlemen?"

For a second all was still as death. Then there was a murmur in the affirmative, and a few growls in the negative.

"The majority allus rules, an' the gal can vote!" Haunted Hank decided. "Come forward, siss, an' cast yer vote, an' then we'll count 'em."

Dora obeyed, willingly.

She had overheard the men who came for her father explain what was wanted of him, and made up her mind to attempt to vote, in hope of getting a temporary reprieve for Gold-dust Dick.

As soon as she dropped the vote into the box the lid was pried open, and the miners crowded around to see that Haunted Hank counted the votes right.

One by one they were selected and deposited

upon the top of a barrel in two piles—one pile "for" and the other "against."

"I'll bet all v'ot I don't know dot Gold-dust Dick don'd come in for der quick trial!" old Joe shouted.

But it looked, as the votes were singled out, as if the prisoner was as liable to get the benefit of a quick trial as any other way, for the votes "for" and "against" seemed to pan out in equal numbers.

It was an exciting moment. Everybody had their heads craned forward to hear the result.

Finally the last vote but one was counted—the tickets ran even in count.

With a cry Haddon held the last one up.

On it was inscribed—"Reprieve!"

Dora's turn it was to utter a thankful cry then. It had been her vote that had won for Gold-dust Dick a respite.

CHAPTER IX.

CONSOLIDATING FORCES.

As far as capacity for villainy was concerned, Tra-la-lee Charley had few equals. He had sprung from an aristocratic and wealthy New England family, not many miles from Plymouth Rock, but, despite this fact, his early boyhood seemed to augur that he was cut out for no particular good purpose in life, although every moral and educational influence had been exerted over him.

But he had drifted away into dissipation and fast habits, until he had finally brought up in Western mining haunts as a gambler and sharp.

Being ordered out of town was something he had never counted on, and it filled him with rage and chagrin to think that it was necessary to his personal safety to leave.

He hurried away into the mountains, and sought a place beneath a shelving ledge to pass the remainder of the night. As soon as it came daylight he arose and sat down on a rock to deliberate.

"It's useless to think of going back to Pistonville, single-handed, for I've got my ticket-of-leave, in dead earnest," he muttered, with a scowl.

"But, I'll yet run that town, and I'll swear to it! The ones who sent me forth, shall learn that Tra-la-lee Charley is not the lad to tamely submit to insult. And, as for that vagabond's proud daughter—oh! but I'll yet humble her, and break her into meek submission to my will!"

Soon after, the gambler arose, and plunged deeper into the mountain wilderness, by way of a narrow ravine, which, for over a mile, grew still narrower and darker, until it suddenly debouched into a traverse canyon of considerable width, and great natural beauty.

But for the narrow ravine, this canyon could not have been reached, except by a long tour over the range of mountains, which this ravine split in twain.

As soon as he entered the canyon, Tra-la-lee Charley directed his footsteps to the northward. In the course of an hour he crossed the canyon, and entered a sort of break, or niche in the foot-hills, and here, presently, emerged into a sort of basin, wherein were built the lodges of a little Indian village.

Without apparent fear he walked boldly down into this village, despite the fact that a motley crowd of the painted denizens huddled about him, jabbering and gesticulating, wildly.

Putting them to one side, he approached the principal, or largest lodge, and would probably have entered, only that the chief made his appearance in the doorway.

The chief, in question, was none other than Silver Fox the Ponca, and it was his village that the gambler had so unceremoniously entered.

A frown came over the face of Silver Fox as he saw the pale-face intruder, for it was very seldom that a white man ever entered the Indian village.

"Ugh! what brings the pale-face dog to the village of the Poncas?" he cried sternly, with a wave of his hand for his braves to gather near, and cut off the chances of the stranger's escape. "Does he not know that it means death for those of his race to come here to the lair of the Silver Fox?"

"Yes, I knew that before coming, and yet hesitated not, because I have something for the Silver Fox to hear that concerns him greatly."

"Then let the pale-face enter the lodge of Silver Fox, be seated, and explain himself. If he comes as a friend, the Poncas will spare his life."

"Tra-la-lee Charley comes as a friend, as the great chief will learn," the gambler replied, as he followed the chief into the lodge.

Once inside, Silver Fox motioned him to a seat on a pile of skins, while he stood near at hand, with a stoic sternness of demeanor habitual with him.

"Let the pale-face speak," he ordered. "The ears of Silver Fox are open."

"Well, I am glad, and I will first speak of myself," Tra-la-lee Charley said. "Until the past night I have been a citizen of Pistolvile—a gambler by profession. A few hours ago I was driven from the town because I took sides against one rascal and outlaw, Gold-dust Dick—the same who refused the hand of the beautiful queen of the Poncas."

The chief uttered a grunt and looked surprised, but did not speak.

"In my trouble I have come to Silver Fox to seek the position that was offered the man, Gold-dust. Has the chief heard of the masked road-agents?"

Silver Fox nodded.

"I thought so!" Guthrie said. "There is a well-organized and disciplined band of them, not many miles from here, who look upon me as their leader. My will is their law. Therefore, smarting under insult and thirsting for revenge, I have come to Silver Fox to propose for the hand of his daughter and the consolidation of both our forces into one formidable band and the inauguration of warfare against the pale-faces of Pistolvile!"

Silver Fox's eyes gleamed with enthusiasm as he listened.

"The pale-face Card-man plots well," he said. "How many men has he at his command?"

"Twenty able-bodied fellows who know how to fight."

"Ugh! That would make the Poncas but

seventy-five strong. The white dogs number many more."

"That matters not! One sudden attack would surprise them, and wipe out a goodly number, after which we could retreat and watch for another opportunity. In this way we could soon own the village and mines, and after that sail in and capture the Aztecs, as you proposed to Gold-dust Dick. Tell me, now—what think you of the matter?"

"The plan of the pale-face is in accordance with the will of Silver Fox, but it is not all for him to say. Starlight must choose her husband for herself. But, how does the Card-man know so much about Silver Fox's interview with Gold-dust Dick?"

"From playing eavesdropper. But, call forth your lovely daughter, Silver Fox, and consult her in regard to this matter."

The chief stepped into an inner division of the lodge, and presently returned, accompanied by Starlight, who looked Tra-la-lee Charley over with a keen, unflinching gaze.

"The daughter of Silver Fox has overheard the pale-face chief's proposal," the old warrior said, "and is willing to do as her father bids, on one condition. Starlight loved Gold-dust Dick, and his refusal of her made a deep wound in her heart. Her love has now all turned to hatred, and nothing but revenge can ever effect her acceptance of his hand. The consolidation can take place at once, but Starlight will only become Tra-la-lee Charley's wife, when he brings her the scalp of Gold-dust Dick."

"Then it shall be my aim henceforth to possess myself of that trophy, to win my beautiful bride with," the gambler declared.

CHAPTER X.

DEADWOOD DICK STANDS REVEALED.

It had been pretty even voting that was to decide the present fate of Gold-dust, and but for Dora Dare's vote, and her timely interception of Tra-la-lee Charley's rascally attempt, the famous ex-road agent would undoubtedly have got an immediate trial and sentence.

As it was, the one vote that decided the matter made it a fact to be followed, that Gold-dust was to have a respite, until a deputy U. S. marshal should have time to arrive and take charge of him.

The result when it became known was received with a loud cheer by those who had voted for a respite; while the opposite party looked decidedly dissatisfied over the result.

But, there was a silence in the crowd, when Haunted Hank rose among them and waved his hand as a signal for them to stop.

"Et's all fair, gents," he declared, with emphasis. "Ye kin bet yer boots. I'd just as lieve 'a' see'd Gold-dust Dick stretched up immejetly, as not; but ther majority rules, an' all we kin do wi' Richard, are to put him in a tight cage, an' see't he stays thar until the deputy U. S. comes to pull him under his wing."

And as Haunted Hank was still law for the Pistovilians, it was settled that Gold-dust Dick should become a guest of the public, until the higher authorities should come to claim him.

He was accordingly placed, bound hand and foot, in a strong cabin, without windows, which had been purposely built to accomodate such Pistovillians as did not keep within the bounds of order.

Around the jail thus tenanted, a guard of six sturdy miners was placed, to prevent the prisoner from escaping—men chosen, too, from that portion of the community who had voted to keep Gold-dust Dick until the sheriff came.

And so it was not highly probable that Richard could gain his freedom very soon again.

The news soon spread beyond the limits of Pistolvile, that the notorious Deadwood Dick was at last captured, and in jail for good, and curious ones came from the adjacent camps in hopes of getting a glimpse of the famous outlaw whose name was familiar from North to South along the golden slopes of the rocky West.

But Haunted Hank, who had constituted himself chief of the jail guard, took good care that no person except those of his posse should get a glimpse at the prisoner, and he even denied himself that privilege, for reasons best known to himself.

On the day following his arrest, at night, Dick sent for the ruffian, and after considerable delay he made his appearance, and was locked in the cabin with his prisoner.

His face wore a sullen, dogged expression, as he set eyes upon Gold-dust, and he stood with folded arms, waiting for him to speak.

"Hank Haddon!" the prisoner said, surveying him sternly, "I have called you here to ask you a question, once and for the last time. Where is Calamity Jane?"

"I have been asked that by you before, by letter, and sent the reply back that I knew nothing of such a party," was the grim reply.

"And upon receipt of the communication, I sent you notice that, unless you delivered her up to me, I would kill you, upon a certain day?"

"You did."

"And I presume you believe I'll do it, do you not?"

"I'll weaken that I did ruther fear ye'd give me a dig in the back, when I wasn't lookin', but now I ain't so much afeard," the ruffian admitted.

"Because I am caged, I suppose?"

"Yas. I reckon ye won't hurt hull families, arter this."

"No, maybe not; but you can rest assured that I'll keep my word with you, unless you come to time."

"I ain't much skeert," the Haunted answered, with bravado. "Ef you was slingin' yerself loosely around, I opine I should feel kind o' skittish—but as she am, I feel jest as safe as ye please."

"It's a good thing you've got so much assurance. But there is the one thing you must tell me—where is Calamity Jane?"

"Again I repeat, I do not know. I ain't so bad a man as some go fer ter make me out, an' ef ye'll agree ter break up yer promise o' vengeance, I don't know but I'll tell ye w'at I know about the gal."

"If you explain to my satisfaction, you will

have no cause to fear me. On the other hand, I will accept of no trumped-up story. So go ahead, if you can do so without falsifying."

"Waal, I reckon I kin do that, an' hyar's all I know about et. Shortly before ye lost track o' Calamity Jane, we war up in that region whar you were located, engaged in the legitermate pursuit of stealin' horses an' sech. By we, I mean a parcel of us rough cusses, headed by Tra-la-lee Charley, who was the boss.

"Waal, one day, et appears, Tra-la-lee set eyes upon Calamity Jane, and was smitten wi' her from the word go. Anyhow, when he rid inter camp that night, he told us boys he'd seen ther prettiest woman in the hills, an' was goin' ter hev her.

"I don't allow we paid much notice to this, ontil one day he fotched her inter camp; then I reckernized her as Calamity Jane, who I used to see up Deadwood country.

"Waal, she was bound hand an' fut, and looked mighty indignant and pitiful by turns, but Tra-la lee Charley only chuckled at her an' called her his wild canary bird, and as how he would have tew take her away to his cage. Once, durin' the three days she war kept in camp, I got a sly chance tew speak to her, an' when she begged me to rescue her, by the grim Moses, I told her I'd try, ef et cost Tra-la-lee's life an' mine, too.

"So, when Tra-la-lee started tew take the gal tew an isolated old ranch up in the mountains, I war layin' fer him, calkylatin' tew trail him an' recapture Calamity; but 'twar no use. I had only got fairly into his rear when the rest o' the boys pounced down onter me, an' that's the last I saw o' Calamity Jane.

"Tra-la-lee come back ter camp a couple o' weeks later 'thout her, but none o' the boys durst question him. I reckon, tho', et explained matters when he hung up a beautiful strip o' woman's soft brown hair to the lodge-pole; et satisfied me that he had done for her in this life, by jingo!"

Deadwood, or Gold-dust Dick, listened with clouded face and flashing eyes; but, when the haunted man paused, he bowed his head and groaned.

"And then it is Tra-la-lee Charley I have to kill instead of you, eh?" he said. "Fool you were for not telling me this long ago. Fool I was for not killing that devil when I had a chance. Oh, that I were free—how I would hunt him down to earth! You may go, sir. My vow of vengeance against you is now revoked!"

One day later, just at sunset, Roxie Ralph returned to Pistolvile to find somewhat of a change since she had left. And the most wonderful of all was that Gold-dust Dick was the famous ex-road-agoat, Deadwood Dick, and now imprisoned, awaiting the arrival of the U. S. marshal or his deputy.

"It's a downright shame, that's what it is," the mountain waif expostulated. "I say Gold-dust Dick war the best sort of a galoot that ever lit down in Pistolvile, an' I'll bet my rifle that he'll never die by hangin'. If I don't mistake, there'll be need o' considerin' his might afore long."

And, when Roxie went to the jail and made

application to see the prisoner, Haunted Hank shook his head.

"Not much, my lassie! You've nothin' to do wi' sech a chap as Deadwood Dick, take my word fer it."

"Oh! ain't I? Well, that remains to be seen. I'm of the opinion that I can see Gold-dust Dick if I choose."

Then she turned away in the stiffest kind of indignation, leaving Haunted Hank to wonder what scheme she had for gaining an interview with the imprisoned Richard of the road.

True to his declaration, Old Joe Dare had sworn off, on losing his interest in the Volcano Mine, and accepted work on another claim, at regular wages.

When he went home that night, after the last disastrous game, and told Dora that all was gone, the poor child received the news in a sort of frozen calmness. Her face was ashen white, her lips rigidly compressed, and in her eyes not one spark of compassion.

"I expected it, and it is but another link toward making me wilder than I am. There is the door, sir—go! You are henceforth no father of mine!"

"V'ot? Gott in Himmel—vas you crazy mit yourself, my shild?" Dare ejaculated, not knowing what to make of it.

"Yes, I am crazy—mad!" Dora cried fiercely, clinching her hands together until the nails cut into the flesh—"mad, and growing more wild, all the time. Tell me! tell me! did you put Gold Dick in prison?"

And she arose to her fullest height, and glared down upon him, with the fierceness of all that the word "mad" implied, causing Joe to shrink back in alarm.

"No! no! I haff nothing to do mit dot, my shild. I don'd vas know somedings all apoud id."

"Well, perhaps not. Nevertheless, you are a base ingrate—an unnatural father, and I will never more have aught to do with you. Go, sir—go! or I will kill you. And above all, keep wide out of my path, hereafter."

And as she spoke, she exposed a dagger, clinched in her hand, and flourished it, fiercely.

"Go!" she fairly screamed, "and never return."

"Yas, I vill do yoost v'ot you say," Joe replied, and with his head bowed upon his breast, he left the house, going out into the night.

What afterward transpired—the capture of Deadwood Dick, and the strange nocturnal election, is already known to the reader.

The next day, Dare procured a job, and labored, industriously, but the scene in his own shanty haunted him, constantly.

"I don'd vas understood all apout dot," he muttered, dubiously. "She act yoost a good deal somewhat like me, ven I vas full, but I am sure she never drank a drop. Off I don'd vas misdaken der vas some screws loose somewhere, an' I vil keep vel oud of der reach of dot butcher-knife; I dinks I vil keep a eye oud, to see v'ot vas going on. Id vas somehow a mixed-up case, anyhow."

And since he had formed this second resolve, he thought there could be no harm in break-

ing the first, and accordingly, that night, celebrated the event by getting extra drunk—which effectually settled any detective inclinations he may have had.

And while he slept in blissful unconsciousness of what was going on, the serpent was entering his own home, and snatching away its last prize.

About half-past two in the morning, half-a-dozen horsemen silently entered the town from the south, or rather, paused upon the outskirts, in a line abreast.

They were all attired in black, hats, masks and all, and even the horses wore somber trappings, while their feet were carefully muffled.

At the right end of the line sat Tra-la-lee Charley, and it was at his word that they had come to a halt.

"There!" he said, pointing through the dim darkness of the night to the Dare shanty. "That is the place I wish to visit, and therein lies my prize. Four of us will dismount here, and steal softly forward, while the others remain here, on guard.

"If a pistol-shot greets your hearing, ride forward swiftly to our rescue, firing and making as much noise as possible.

Then four left their saddles and crept stealthily forward toward the shanty. They soon gained a position close beside the walls of the dwelling. All was quiet about it.

"I reckon she's gone to sleep," Tra-la-lee Charley said, "and in that event it will be an easy matter to take her. Women are generally sound sleepers."

"Don't you fool yourself about that," one of the outlaws chuckled. "Ef I know anything about the plaguey critters, they're allus awake, or sleepin' wi' one eye open. I used to hev a better-half, thet laid fer me behind the door, all times o' night, when I cum home, an' thar wasn't no more use a-tryin' ter shet her eye up than thar is tryin' tew make a dorg sing psalms, you bet your boots!"

A grunt from several others seemed to approve of this view.

"Well, be that as it may, I don't believe we shall have much trouble in taking this bird," the captain replied.

And he was right. No difficulty was experienced in forcing the door, and entering the shanty; then, to snatch Dora Dare from where she sat asleep in a chair, and bind and gag her, was but the work of a moment.

"Away with her, now, to my mountain cage!" at once ordered the vile leader.

They left the cabin and bore her to the horses.

Soon after, all hands had left Pistolvile far behind, and were speeding through the mountains like the grim night-hawks they were.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW WAY OF GOING TO JAIL.

It was not discovered until the next morning that Dora Dare had been abducted; then, when some chance caller did make the discovery, the following notice was found pinned to the wall, written in large pen print:

"Deem yourselves not safe or secure, even in your own homes, for Tra la-lee Charley knows no mercy for his enemies."

The discoverer quickly communicated the intelligence to others, and in half an hour not a person in Pistolville but had heard of Miss Dare's mysterious disappearance, and was naturally anxious over the strange warning of Tra-la-lee Charley.

When old Joe was hunted up, he was found in an out-of-the-way place in a state of semi-intoxication.

"Mine gal Dora gone!" he ejaculated, doubtfully, when told of the abduction. "Vel I youst t'ought she'd got mad, and run away mit herself. V'ot haff pecome of her? Did she take der house and furniture mit her?"

"No! no! you don't understand, Joe," one of the miners volunteered to explain. "Your daughter has been carried off by a ruffian, into captivity—by your partner that was, in fact."

"V'ot? Tra-la-lee Sharley?"

"Ay! Tra-la-lee Charley."

"Und he run avay off, und take mine shild mit him?"

"I reckon that's about the size of it, old man."

"Then, so helb me gracious, I vas a pig fool! Vy didn't I muzzle mine bung-hole und stop der visky, 'fore I lost all mine property, und finally mine girl? Oh! shimmey blazes! I feel yoost like go drownin' myself."

"You've tried that on, long enough, without making a success out of it; you absorb it too fast. Why don't you try some other tack?"

Dare looked sheepish, and turned away toward his shanty, which to him had now lost its fairest ornament; for, despite his failings, he dearly loved his only child.

And while the notice left by Tra-la-lee Charley created no alarm, it still excited a feeling of uneasiness, for the supposition was that he was now allied with some lawless band.

And if such were the case, and knowing his villainous disposition, as they did, they were pardonable if their belief was that he would attempt to wreak vengeance on those who had driven him forth from the mining town.

As if to corroborate this theory, the stage came thundering into town, that night, pretty well riddled with bullets, and with one wounded horse in the lead, and several dead and wounded passengers on the inside.

"Road-agents, half-breeds, Injuns!" was the significant reply of the driver, in answer to the questions put to him. "Ye can bet yer uncle never draws reins over that air trail again, nuther! She am emphatically too hot fer me!"

Then, after he got sufficient breath, he went on to relate that a large band of mixed Indians and whites had attacked the stage, not four miles from Pistolville, and that it was only after a terrible struggle he had been able to break away, at the peril of his own life, by shooting down the four men who held the horses.

Jack Mahone had driven the stage to and from many different mining-camps, and was not the man to 'skeer' at moderate disturbances. But he avowed this was the worst call toward the grim land that he had ever had, and

he would never pick up a rein over that route again, so long as it was infested with road-agents.

"I tell ye," he averred—"an' ye'll allow et requires a powerful dose to skeer me—I tell ye, I wouldn't kerry a load over that trail ag'in, et present, fer the best mine in Pistolville, fer my carcass would likely be scattered so fur, tbat it would cost a mine ter get a search-warrant long enough to find all the pieces. "Tain't because I lack the grit, but because I'd like to live a little while longer. That ain't all, nuther. Ef I ain't off my kerbase, this here town will get a blast from the cusses."

"Pooh! They'd not stand a ghost of a show a-fightin' wi' us—you bet," Hank Haddon declared. "Thar ain't no tribe o' humans equal ter handlin' us royal pards o' Pistolville."

"Mebbe not," Mahone retorted, "unless they grab at you when your belt's not tight, which they'll do, most likely. Ef I war goin' to bet at all, I'd bet that there won't be much left o' Pistolville inside of six weeks."

But the majority of the townspeople did not feel disposed to see matters in this light—so Mahone said no more.

He was a rough but handsome and goodly sort of fellow, as fearless as a lion, at most times, and with a heart as true as steel to those he liked.

And out of all, his heart was the truest to pretty Roxie Ralph, on whom his fancy had first fixed, when she was a smaller girl, only to increase, as she grew toward the budding of womanhood.

But wild, hoydenish, roving Roxie had never cared a fig for Jack, evidently, and what few advances he had summoned up courage to make had been the same as wasted on desert air.

That night Roxie rode into town, astride her donkey, looking as demure and independent as a rosy peach—perhaps from the fact that a number of mountain fowls were fastened to her saddle-bow.

As usual, a lot of the miners, with whom she was a favorite, crowded about as she drew rein, with expressions of anxiety upon their faces.

At which the elf of the mountains laughed.

"Well! well! what is the matter?" she demanded. "You all look as if you'd seen a ghost, or su'thin' of the kind. What ails ye?"

"Oh! not much; only we've bin feelin' the least bit dubious," was a miner's reply. "Hev ye seen any signs—any troubulous signs, gal?"

"Well, yes. I see'd two grizzlies fight to-day, an' enjoyed the sport amazin'. An' the joke of it all was that the littlest griz licked blazes out of the biggest one."

"But, gal, that ain't the p'int. Hev ye seen any Injuns?"

"Injuns?"

"Yes—Tra-la-lee Charley an' his gang o' red an' white cut-throats?"

"Nary an Injun, tho' I'll allow I hev seen sum tracks, w'at savored suspiciously o' the red heathen. Thar's tracks, too, not fur from town."

A murmur of consternation passed through the audience at this news.

"Kind of looks dangerous, eh?" Roxie went on. "Well, et struck me so, an' I guess we'll

hear from some quarter, afore many days. Reckon, too, that the Injuns an' road agents have consolidated—that is, in plain English, 'gone in snucks,' an' if that's so, et wouldn't be a bad idea fer us all ter get our hair shaved off, down close to our scalps."

"Pshaw! We can down 'em—we can down 'em!" Haddon cried.

"I should hate to risk much on et. Tra-la-lee Charley, if he's at the helm, is a keen-edged chap, and he don't make many moves what ain't safe, ef I remember his topographical constitution."

The Pistolvillians needed not to be told of this fact, for on more than one occasion had the wily gambler and sport roped them in, in various ways.

"I for one think it is no more than right that we should prepare ourselves for an anticipated attack, and thus prevent the possibility of defeat," a sensible miner suggested.

"And, still better than that, if you fo'kes w'at's got property, want tew work it, henceforth, ye can't do a likelier thing than to give Gold-dust Dick his liberty, an' let him have command. Mark yer darter's word, boys—ef any man can bring about order out of chaos, he's the man."

A murmur of dissent went up at this from the large majority.

"I ruther allow not!" a lesser rough than Horrible Hank himself, exclaimed. "We've got Deadwood Dick caged where he'll keep without saltin', an' that's the end of him till the deputy marshal arrives to claim him."

"Well, do as ye please, my independent huckleberries; but I've a faint idea that you'll be glad of his services before you get out of the threatened danger. You needn't take my word for it, neither, if you don't want to!"

And she rode on.

Roxie Ralph was credited with being keen and smart, despite the fact that her father was a sluggish, listless sort of an every-day laboring man; but Roxie was sharper, in truth, than she was given credit for being.

At any rate, she was too much for the watchful guard, who patrolled the immediate vicinity of Deadwood Dick's prison, and while they were ignorant of the fact, she had, a few hours succeeding the events last narrated, gained a position on the roof of the shanty itself.

Fortunately for her, the night was darker than usual, and, once she had gained her elevated position, there was little danger that she would be discovered.

Careful always, she had formed her plans beforehand, and there was consequently no delay when she reached the roof.

Armed with a long stout lariat, she crept along the ridge board to the wide, old-fashioned chimney, which yawned down into an open fireplace, within the primitive jail.

Fastening one end of the rope securely around the chimney itself, she dropped the other down into the dark aperture.

In a moment more, regardless of soot, she was gliding down the rope, and in less time than it

takes to tell it, stood within the cell of Deadwood Dick.

That personage was partly reclining on a pile of skins, with a paper in hand, which he was reading by aid of the light afforded by a flickering candle, and, as may be imagined, he looked up, considerably surprised, when he saw a very dark specimen of the human race standing before him—for Roxie was about as black as any young wench could reasonably expect to be.

"Well," he exclaimed, rising to a sitting posture, "what does this mean? Who are you, my dusky friend?"

"Rollicking Roxie, you bet!" was the composed reply, as the daring girl proceeded to mop off her face with the lower end of her jacket. "Did you think it was the Old Nick, Mr. Deadwood Dick?"

"In truth, I did," the prisoner answered. "How came you here, young lady?"

"Oh! down through the chimney! I was playin' up Santa Claus on the half-shell. Them galoots outside said I couldn't come in, an' so I jist made up my mind I would ef it took all winter. An' here I am."

"But why? It was very rash of you. You might be discovered and subjected to much indignity."

"Oh! they dassent hurt me, not much. Besides, I wanted to see you an' talk out my mind. You see, I made up my mind that you're a nice fellow."

Dick did not smile.

The remembrance of other days when more than one unsophisticated girl had thought the same flashed across his mind.

"You are foolish to think of such a thing," he said. "I am a bold, bad, wicked man, and you sin to waste a thought on such as I."

"Oh! git out! I ain't no fool, you bet, an' I know when a feller's good an' when he ain't, just by instinct. I know you've been bad, an' that every one's hand, nigh about, has been raised against you. But that ain't to say that you can't be good if you try. Have you got a gal?"

"I did have a wife—may have one now, though I am inclined to believe that she is dead. She suddenly disappeared, and I have since learned that she was stolen by the wretch, Tra-la-lee Charley, whom you know probably better than I."

"Yas, I reckon I've hearn tell on him. An' so you reckon you wouldn't darst, even if inclined, take a rough but honest little nugget like me, fer better or wuss, till ye found for sure that Mrs. Deadwood Dick, number one, was actually departed this life?"

"No, I would not."

"Too bad. I'd hitch up with you in a minute, if I had the chance. But if it ain't possible, I'll live and die an old maid. I s'pose you're ready to leave this place?"

"When released by the proper authorities, yes."

"But I've got a better way. Climb up that rope— Ah!"

She uttered a startled cry, as she turned and glanced in the direction of the chimney.

The rope had been drawn up out of sight.

Dick discovered the fact almost as soon as

she, and an expression of anxiety mantled his features.

"You are discovered," he said. "It is too bad. I am afraid it will go hard with you."

"Don't fear for me. I am not afeard. My only regret is that I am not able to rescue you now. Never mind, however. If I have failed this time, that does not signify that I will the next."

"But will they not harm you?"

"No. I am regarded as of too much value to the interests of the camp, for them to do that. Ah, here come the guards!"

True enough, the door was unlocked and opened, and four men, with Haunted Hank, entered the prison, if such it could be termed.

"Ah, my dear Miss Ralph, excuse me if I intrude!" the king-pin of the Pistolville roughs exclaimed, "but do you not find it rather an embarrassing position to be closeted with a young man in such a manner? Thort I'd come ter yer resky, ye see, an' let yer out."

"You are ever so kind," Roxie replied, composedly. "I am ready to go. Good-by, Mr. Dick. I couldn't rest till I came and tendered you spiritual consolation, seeing as you are so near the end."

Then the strange girl suffered herself to be led from the prison.

"A brave girl," Deadwood Dick muttered—"undoubtedly a noble one. Something in her prompt and confident manner puts me in mind of my poor lost Calamity Jane!"

The next evening at sunset, a ragged, blear-eyed, sandy-whiskered being of the tramp persuasion, rode into Pistolville on the stage, and, soon after, mounted an empty barrel in front of the Old Bourbon saloon, whereat he commenced to yell and gesticulate wildly.

As might be expected, there was an immediate collecting of a crowd.

And when the crowd had assembled to some considerable numbers, the tramp ceased his Comanche-like yells, smiled blandly, rubbed his hands together, and exclaimed:

"Gents, I am the Honorable Eurastus Ephriam Leatherhead!"

And this announcement was greeted with a loud cheer.

CHAPTER XII.

TRAPPED.

It was not so much the words of the tramp that had agitated the risibilities of the rough audience, as the adaptation of the individual to his name.

"Yes, gentlemen, Eurastus Ephriam Leatherhead am I!" the eccentric stranger repeated, with a benign grin, "with Reverend hitched to the fore part. I am a divine, oh! my hearers, sent down here by the Apostles, to snort and exhort to you—not about comin' sin, but about the project of raising the price o' labor, so that the workingman can live. And now, feller-hearers, hevin' told ye what I'm hear fer, I'll step into the saloon hyar, an' take a 'seal-skin' to enliven my solar system, after which I'll be with you again, in the jerk o' a lamb's tail."

So saying the tramp leaped from the barrel, and disappeared within the Bourbon.

Doubting not his word, and anxious to "get on to" what he was up to the crowd outside waited for his return with lamb-like docility.

Waited fully ten minutes and still the divine came not—and there was not a man in the crowd who could not have taken at least a dozen "seal-skins" in that length of time.

What was the matter? Had the lecturer forsaken his calling in favor of the "bug-juice" bottle, or had he perpetrated a big sell on them?

They were beginning to grow restless, when there came a pandemonium of yells, accompanied by a volley of shots.

They had been tricked and trapped! They were the victims of a surprise attack by the outlaws!

And with what result?

Only one volley had been fired, but that had been destructive to more than a dozen lives! while hardly a man of the lot escaped being wounded in some manner.

No sooner did the outlaws score this victory than they made a precipitate retreat out of the camp, from behind the different shanties which had held them in ambush.

Being well mounted they had no difficulty in so doing, without loss to their number, for few shots were sent after them.

The surprise had been so sudden and so effective, that the victors were well away, ere the victims could recover from their consternation.

When, however, they finally did, the dead and dying were carried to their different homes and boarding-houses, and those whose curiosity had not prompted them to listen to the divine Leatherhead, acted in the capacity of surgeons and nurses.

The next day the excitement was greater than during the night, for all work was suspended, and the uninjured part of the population clustered about in knots to discuss the matter.

Among those who had been killed was the local ringleader, Haunted Hank, and several others of his kind, so the town was left in reality without a leader or boss.

And this, too, when the people most needed a commander, who could circumvent any further attack from the marauders.

Deadwood Dick heard of the trouble, when his breakfast of corn bread and water was brought in.

"I am sorry," he said, "and if I were permitted to have my liberty, I should lend a helping hand, so far as lies in my power."

This news was communicated to the outsiders, and while a few of them were in favor of putting Deadwood Dick in command, the majority loudly disapproved, and the minority, of course, had to weaken.

"I perpose that we don't hav no leader, onless she be Roxie Ralph!" one miner advocated. "On course, she's stuck on the outlaw, an' she won't want harm to come to the place, as long as he's here."

But Roxie wasn't to be found.

After being taken from the jail, she had been handed over to the care of her father, with orders that she should be kept shut up.

But that was all the good it did. When

looked for, she was missing, and Mr. Ralph could not tell where, when or how she had escaped.

So another day passed without Pistolville having a head man, as 'most every rough mining-town generally does.

Early the third day, a posse of horsemen rode into the town and drew up at the Bourbon.

The leader's attire pronounced him to be a U. S. marshal, while his company were soldiers, evidently of the regular army.

The marshal himself was not a large person, and was clad in loose-fitting garments, while his features were for the most part hidden beneath a bushy beard.

His belt bristled with weapons, however, which were at contrast with the small, shapely gloved hand, supposed to use them.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, pleasantly, to the men who were lounging about the door, "I hear you've been successful in taking and holding a noted criminal for me to bag?"

"Yas, I reckon we've got Deadwood Dick down fine," one of the miners said. "Be you the marshal?"

"I have that honor, yes, sir. I was informed that you held the ex-outlaw for me to take charge of."

"Yas, we have. He's there in yonder jail, and the quicker you make away with him, the better et'll suit us. But thar's more work heer fer ye to do, I reckon, aside from swingin' off the Gold-dust galoot. Our town war night afore last set upon by a gang o' Injuns, road-agents, an' the like, an' thar's severial stiffs a-layin' around ready fer plantin' to show fer it. Tharfore, ye see, we want protection."

"And you shall have it, as soon as I go back to headquarters. If I had not other important business to attend to, I would remain now and lend you what assistance I could in hunting down the party. As it is, however, I cannot stay with you any longer than is required to take charge of the prisoner, and prepare him for the journey."

Accordingly, a dismount was made, the marshal was conducted to the jail, and introduced to Gold-dust Dick, *alias* Deadwood Dick—rather a mock introduction, too, it might have seemed, for it was hardly probable that either the officer or the captive could bear much love for each other, under the circumstances.

"Mr. Edward Harris, I am extremely well pleased to meet you," the marshal greeted, bowing, "for the reason that I consider it an honor to hold such a notorious character as you, in durance vile."

"Presumedly," Dick responded, with composure, "and I fancy I shall be equally pleased to see you do it, my friend!"

"Ah! then you still retain your old self-reliance in outwitting the shrewdest of the servants of the law, do you?"

"I dare say I retain what ability I have shown heretofore in that line, sir. The law has never been so kindly toward me that I should any longer seek to court its favor."

"Nor have you been so law-abiding that the law will think of favoring you," was the retort. "You will get your deserts this time without

fail, and deservedly so. We shall now take you to headquarters for trial and execution."

"Very well. While you have the power it is your duty to exercise it," Dick replied, and permitted them to bind him, for there were too many armed men present for it to be possible for him to escape had he been so inclined.

As soon as he was bound to the satisfaction of the marshal, he was led from the jail and mounted upon a horse, his feet so fastened he could not slip from the saddle.

Three of the soldiers then also mounted, and two rode beside Dick to the edge of the town, while the third brought up the rear with a cocked rifle, and ready for use.

At the edge of the town a halt and wait was made for the remainder of the party to join them, which was done about an hour later, when all hands set out toward the southeast at an easy gallop.

Dick was kept in the same position as that in which he started, the majority of the company following behind.

Not a word was spoken nor a halt made until the noonday sun burst from behind banks of clouds just as they reached a a ford on a small, deep stream.

Here the others dismounted, and the horses were put out to graze, but Deadwood Dick was kept in his saddle and fed a few mouthfuls of jerked venison by the marshal.

After an hour the stream was crossed and the journey resumed in the same order as before.

Dick made sundry little observations as they jogged along which convinced him that, instead of going away from Pistolville, they were in reality circling back toward it.

What reason there could be for doing this he could not for the life of him imagine.

They were now once more among the foot-hills of the same range wherein Pistolville was located, and night coming on—what possible object could there have been in making the wide *detour* that was bringing them back within no great distance of the original starting-point?

Night soon began to deepen, and, owing to their route through the depths of a mountain, it was dark there sooner than in the outer world.

When it was almost too dark to longer travel, the party drew rein and dismounted, and Dick was also taken from the saddle and allowed the use of his feet, while a lariat was noosed about his neck and tied to an overhanging limb, securing him much the same as a horse would have been.

The soldiers then proceeded to build camp-fires, and prepare an evening repast, while the marshal unstrapped a bundle from his saddle-bow, and set off up the gulch on foot.

This began to give Dick a suspicion that all was not exactly as it appeared, and he waited with eagerness for the official's return.

But, instead of the officer, he soon after saw Roxie Ralph saunter leisurely into camp, with a bundle under his arm.

He then understood it all.

It had been Roxie who had released him from captivity in Pistolville, she assuming the disguise of a marshal.

And, right well she had succeeded, for in her

make-up," she betrayed no femininity whatever.

But, who were her companions?

As if she interpreted his thoughts, and wished to answer them, she came toward him, a peculiar smile upon her face.

"Well, I suppose you've tumbled to the game, by this time, haven't you?" she said, unloosening the noose from his neck, and cutting the thongs that bound him. "I am the marshal."

"I had just arrived at that conclusion before you spoke. Why did you do such a thing?"

"Because I chose. If I hadn't, the real marshal would have soon popped along, popped you before a judge and jury, and off would went your spirit to some other clime. If ye don't like bein' set free, I opine that you can hoof et back to Pistolville, and surrender yerself."

"Thank you, I don't believe I'll hardly do that since you've taken so much pains to liberate me. But, who are these men who have been working with you?"

"A party of secret miners in soldiers' disguise, who are making for the heart of Indian Territory, on the sly, to explore for gold. I met 'em, laid my case before them and finally succeeded in hiring them to give you a lift."

"For which service I am very grateful toward them, as well as yourself," Dick said, bowing.

"Waal, I dunno as et was hardly a legal purceeding," a big strapping fellow averred, who appeared to stand in as a sort of leader of the gang, as well as a spokesman for them.

"But ye see it war kinder a hard thing to refuse a little gal like this; an' then, when she told me who ye was, I remembered that a brother o' mine used to be with yer party up in Deadwood country, and as how I heerd him say w'at you was a square sort o' galoot. So I sez to the boys, we'll give him his liberty."

"Again I thank you. Although liberty cannot be the same to me as it is to other men, I none the less appreciate it, all the more so because I have a mission to fulfill."

"What is that?" Roxie asked.

"Hunt down the rascal who boasts of the name of Tra-la-lee Charley. I have a settlement to effect with him."

"Then we will remain here till morning, when I'll go with you if you will allow."

"Thanking you, I would prefer to go alone," Deadwood Dick responded, gloomily.

CHAPTER XIII.

STARLIGHT'S JEALOUSY—AND OLD JOE'S ADVENTURE.

It had been a bad move for Tra-la-lee Charley, when he captured and carried off Dora Dare, for he soon found out that she was demented and that fact made her no longer an object of admiration to him, but rather, one of fear and disgust.

He dare not let her go free, for he knew she was so violently crazy that it would not augur to his good health for her to be roaming around; therefore he kept her locked up in a lone cabin, in the mountains, where she could do nobody any harm but herself, and sent one of his men, every other day, to supply her with food.

But, careful though he was to keep every-

thing away from Starlight, the Ponca princess, she in some way found out enough to arouse all the jealousy in her nature; and as a consequence, Tra-la-lee Charley was one evening summoned to the lodge of Silver Fox.

Not dreaming that anything had gone wrong, he answered the summons, immediately, and found the old chief and his daughter seated within the former's wigwam, Silver Fox smoking his long pipe.

"The great chief of the Poncas sent for me, did he not?" the villain asked, as he entered, and threw himself carelessly upon a pile of skins.

"Ay, Silver Fox sent for white dog," was the grim response. "Silver Fox feel great anger in his heart, and want white dog to take his braves and go."

"What the deuce is the matter? What have I done to merit this sudden dismissal, pray?" Tra-la-lee Charley demanded, not knowing what to make of it, for since allying himself and band with the Poncas, everything had worked harmoniously.

"Has the pale-face traitor any cause to ask that? Can he think of no deed he has committed, which would give Starlight great anger?" the Indian girl broke forth, fiercely.

"Not that I call to mind, just now," the outlaw replied, although he had already guessed what she was getting at.

"Wagh! pale-face lies!" Silver Fox cried. "Pale-face keep not his word. Pale-face ask Silver Fox for his daughter--now, he got white wife."

"Ah! how know you this?"

"By the way in which the red-man finds out where hides the enemy," was the reply. "The pale-face was watched, and his secret squaw was discovered! Ugh!"

"Well, I am sorry about that," the gambler said, with unruffled composure—"sorry that you had such a tramp, for discovering so little. Instead of being my wife, the poor creature you found me visiting is no less a personage than my own sister—my poor sister!"

"Pale-face lie!" Silver Fox growled.

"Tra-la-lee Charley cannot fool Starlight!" the girl exclaimed. "Why does he keep pale-face squaw hidden in the mountain, if she not his wife?"

"Easily enough explained. The poor girl is a mad-woman—crazy, and it is necessary to keep her shut up in a safe place, where she cannot get at anybody to do them injury."

"And you swear this is true?"

"Ay, a hundred times if necessary."

"Then let me tell you that you are a dog and a liar. The girl is not your sister, nor your wife, even. She belongs at the settlement, and her name is Dora Dare!"

Tra-la-lee wilted at this. He had been deliberately caught in his own lie, after supposing he was safe in telling it, and as a consequence, did not know hardly what to say for a few minutes thereafter.

"Well, since you seem to know so much about it, I don't know as there is any use in denial, and perhaps you can inform me for what purpose I hold her a captive?"

"For no good purpose. The warrior who makes war on women is a dog soldier—worse

than a snake," Silver Fox said. "The pale-face squaw may go; Starlight can never be his."

"All right! I ain't very particular on *that* score, I assure you," was the reply, as the renegade left the lodge.

Once outside, his seeming composure vanished, and a dark scowl came over his face.

"It's a cussed bad piece of luck. Between the two fires, I'm in danger of getting scorched. If I had known when I was well off, I'd have let the Dare girl alone."

Joe Dare could not rest.

The knowledge that his daughter was in the power of his former villainous associate gave him great uneasiness, knowing that Tra-la-lee Charley was a very devil, when angered, who took pleasure in his acts of wickedness.

Therefore unable to remain longer in Pistolvile without making an effort to find her, he set forth into the mountains the morning after Deadwood Dick's rescue.

"I vill dry und vind her, und uff I don'd vas do id, nopody can't blame me," was his uttered reflection.

All day long he wandered through the rugged mountainous country, and when night began to fall, he was some twenty miles from any habitation, the nearest being at Pistolvile.

This fact began to occur to him as the darkness came creeping on, for be it said, Dutch Joe was not the bravest man in the world, especially when it was a dark night and he was alone.

"I don'd vas like dis so mooch as I might. I vish I don'd come so far away vrom home, all de v'ile. Id vas mighty lonlysome v'en id got dark."

This fact was not alleviated any by another one particularly noticeable, which was that a heavy rain-storm was impending.

Dark clouds were beginning to roll up on the horizon threateningly, and the thunder began to mutter ominously.

Dare well knew that a thunder-storm in the mountains at that particular time of year, was a thing not pleasant to encounter, as it usually raged with fierceness, to say nothing about the danger from lightning, which had left the mark of its blast upon more than one tree or rock.

"Id vas goin' to dunder und lightning, too, und I'll bet a dollar dot I got struck, yoost vor not knowin' enough to stay to home. Oh! gracious, v'ot a vool I vas! I don'd know v'ot to do. Uff I stay oud in de rain I get wet—if I got under some shelter, I get struck mit lightning all der v'ile, und melted all oop into a chunk of gravy. Oh! shimmery! uff I had dot girl here, I'd preak her eye yoost for gettin' me into such a scrape."

And the poor fellow nearly cried, so desperate did the situation seem to him. To remain where he was in darkness and storm seemed horrible.

He began to cast about him for a place of shelter.

He was at the bottom of a narrow ravine, and hurried on up its course. In a few minutes he came to a black opening in the walls of the passage, like to the mouth of a cave.

"Ah! dot vas goot," was the decision. "I crawl in there, and get avay from der dunder,

lightning and the storm. I vonder if der' vas some snakes or other animals in dare?"

Inclined to be sure before venturing in, however, he gathered a number of rocks, and began to hurl them into the black place, which had anything but an inviting appearance.

No wild animals made their appearance, and satisfied that the hole was uninhabited by them, he crept doubtfully in.

The opening was just about large enough to admit of his entrance, and ran back into the rock for a considerable distance.

After he got in a couple of lengths of his body he found the passage growing wider, which induced him to go on further, his fear somewhat abated.

In this way he crept along through the strange subterranean flue, until he at length debouched upon a level sort of plateau, hemmed in on every side by towering walls of rock.

The flue had probably at some remote age been a water-course or outlet, and the strange basin a mountain lake.

Across the plateau was a similar opening in another wall of rock.

"Vell, I hope to die uff dose ain'd der funniest thing I effer see," Joe exclaimed in wonderment. "A veller could lif here a whole life, mitoud being visited py his mudder-in-law und relations. I vonder where der odder hole goes to. I dink I von't explore id to-night!"

It was raining down into the basin, and so he turned and crept into the flue, which afforded good shelter.

Here he stretched himself for a good snooze, but on second thought he crept on still further into the passage, so that he could not hear the thunder.

He had not lain there long ere he heard a sound as though some one or something was creeping toward him.

Quickly raising his head—and it is unnecessary to state that his hair raised even sooner than his head—he listened attentively, but heard no repetition of the sound.

"I guess dot vas a freak mit my imagination," Joe muttered. "If id vas somepody, I vould heer 'em now."

Nevertheless he felt very nervous, and kept a watch in the direction whence came the sound.

Ten minutes passed and still he heard nothing, but suddenly his gaze became riveted upon a couple of small fiery objects in the distance, like two tiny balls of fire.

"Hello, v'ot ish dot?" he muttered, a chill of terror creeping down his spine. "I'll bet a half a dollar dot vas two vellers smokin' cigars. Oh! dunder! uff I vas only back in Pistolvile!"

A steady glance at the two sparks, soon satisfied him that they were approaching nearer and nearer.

What was he to do?

There was nothing but retreat into the basin.

Starlight the Ponca was even more jealous than Tra-la-lee Charley had supposed, and her jealousy was of a revengeful nature.

Not long after her interview with her faithless suitor, she stole out of the village to the cor-

ral just beyond, and selecting out a fine pony, mounted it, and rode away.

Early nightfall saw her draw rein before a rude old log cabin among the mountains, miles from her own village.

She dismounted. Leaving her horse to graze, she approached the door, and tried it.

It opened without difficulty and she entered.

There was but one room and this was now untenanted!

"She has escaped!" the girl hissed, in a passion. "This is the place where she was confined, and she is not here. It is lucky for her! If Starlight had found her, she would have taken her scalp, and worn it at her belt as a trophy to show Tra-la-lee Charley."

"Were you making those remarks about me?"

Starlight started and looked toward the door at sound of the voice.

Dora Dare stood there, a terrible picture to look at.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE SILENT CITY—A TERRIBLE ACT—DICK ON THE TRAIL AGAIN.

To return to Joe Dare, the frightened Dutchman had not gone more than fifty feet, on his retreat, when a yell of horror escaped his lips.

Some person had seized firmly hold of his lower extremities, at the ankles, and held them as though in a gripe of iron.

"Hello! let up dere! V'ot you vas mean by all dese foolishness?" he yelled, attempting to release himself.

Then some one else grabbed him around the throat, and Joe was able to discern an Indian, hanging over him, whose fiery eyeballs it was he had seen approaching.

His heart now sunk within him, and he gave vent to a lusty yell.

"Stop! Murder! Murder!" he yelled. "Oh! spare me, Mr. Injun, und I neffer come here again. Oh, please don'd vas take my scalp, for I vant to use him yet awhile!"

For answer, the terrified Dutchman was dragged along through the subterranean passage, until the basin was reached, when he was placed upon his feet, still in the grasp of his two captors, both of whom were as savage-looking red-men as he had ever seen.

"Now, see here—stop av'ile," he said, as the two captors began to peer into his face, and make queer grimaces. "I don'd vas vant you vellers to t'ink dot I am afraid of you, vor I ain'd. I'm von off der baddest pale-faces, v'en I got r'iled, vot von neffer see, und I pet you yoost swel dollar ther healthiest thing you can do, vas let me go!"

This expostulation, however, did not appear to frighten the brawny savages, for they only giggled, and proceeded to march him across the bottom of the basin, to the other aperture.

This was larger, and they could walk in it, in a half-bent way, instead of crawling, as they had through the other one.

After following it a few seconds, they debouched into a large subterranean cavern or room, whose high rocky ceiling was studded with pendants of rock, as though hung and hardened there, by ages of formation.

Within the cavern were perhaps a dozen skin

lodges, in front of the most of which fires were burning, the smoke of which ascended in crevices in the ceiling.

About in the center of the cavern was a fixture resembling a well-curb, around a shaft which descended into the earth or rock. To the right of this a body of Indians were drawn up four abreast, facing the cavern's entrance, all armed with tomahawks and long spears.

Like Dare's two captors, they were very gaunt and unnatural specimens of the human red race, although evidently possessed of a great amount of brute strength, if not skill, in warfare; while, with exception of breech-cloth, they were quite naked.

As Joe and his captors entered the cavern, there was a roll like the beating of a drum; the warriors held their spears forward, in a warlike attitude, and a man came forward from one of the lodges, and stood at the head of the Indians, with a saber in his grasp.

He was none other than Black Hand, the White Aztec, and as the reader has probably surmised, this was the Silent City of the Aztecs, which Gold-dust had been invited to preside over.

Joe's two guards marched him firmly forward, until he stood a few feet from the White Aztec, who regarded him sternly.

"You are a white man?" he said, rather interrogatively.

"Vel, if I know anydings apoud it, I dink asn how I am," Joe replied, not knowing whether to be afraid, or no. "Anyhow, I don'd neffer vas called a nager."

"But what brings you here to the Silent City of the Aztecs?"

"Two big Injines v'ot you see here. I crawl mit a hole inside, und yoost ven I vant to sleebe, von ketch me py der heels, and der udder one py der head, and make me coome alorg mit dem."

"Where did you come from, sir?"

"Pistolville, py gracious, und I only vish I vas pack there again."

"What is your name?"

"Joe Dare."

"Ah! I have heard of you. Now, Mr. Dare, I am rather sorry you ventured here, for it will be necessary for you to take up your permanent residence with us, as those who discover our secret city, we never permit to go forth to betray its existence to others."

"But, yoost let me go pack to Pistolville, und so helb me gracious, I nefer say a vord about der blace, or you, or der Injines."

"That is impossible. You must remain here with us, and become one of us."

"V'ot? me pecome von injine? Vel, now, I jest reckon nixy."

"You do not necessarily become an Indian, but you remain with us, and work with us. If you do that, eventually you become owner of all this vast domain—this golden subterranean city, which contains the yield of years of mining, and whose veins are exhaustless."

"Vel, if dot ish so, I'll t'ink about it," Joe replied, rather liking the picture.

Once pretty and good to look upon, Dora Dare no longer possessed those features, as seen by the Poncas girl.

Her face was scratched, bleeding and haggard, her eyes wild and unnatural in their glare, her hair disheveled.

Her dress was torn into shreds, and no shoes were upon her feet. She looked like some crazy witch of forty, more than like her former young blithe self.

The glance that she sent at Starlight was that of a savage maniac, and the Ponca girl inwardly wished that she had undertaken an easier job.

"You were speaking of me!" the demented girl repeated—this time positively. "I overheard you. You came here to kill me."

"Yes, and that's my intention yet!" was the fierce response. "You lover of Tra-la-lee Charley, and I take your scalp."

"Ha! ha! ha! You talk of taking my scalp! Why, you can't touch a hair of my head. I'll kill *you*, instead, because you tried to get my lover, Gold-dust Dick, away from me."

Then the two girls stood for an instant, glaring at each other with all the hatred of two tigresses.

But for an instant, only; then, with a simultaneous cry they sprung toward each other, with uplifted blades; there was a clash of steel against steel—then a shriek of mortal agony, and a fall.

It was not Starlight who fell; it was poor Dora Dare.

On the morning following his release, Deadwood Dick bade adieu to his rescuers, including Roxie, whom he advised to return to Pistolvile, and set out on foot, as he said, to hunt down Tra-la-lee Charley.

He had to go on foot because he had no horse, nor any wherewithal to purchase a horse with.

"You'd better let me go along with ye," Roxie said, as he was about to leave. "Why, I won't be the least trouble to you, whatever, and you may need a helping hand."

"I'll take chances on that, anyhow. I could not for a moment think of allowing you to venture into further danger than you have already risked for my sake. You have friends and relatives—I have none. If I should go under no one would be to blame for it—no one to mourn for me."

"Well, I guess thar'd be about one mourner, at least. But if you will go, and won't let me go with you, here's my revolvers and rifle; take them, so that you will have something to protect yourself with."

"Thank you. I will accept one of your revolvers—no more. The first road-agent or red-skin I happen to down, I will deprive of his rifle."

Accordingly he accepted one of Roxie's revolvers, and once more bidding all adieu, he set forth.

It took him until about noon to get out from among the foot-hills; then, shaping his course according to Roxie's directions, he set out for the Indian village of the Poncas, where he expected to find Tra-la-lee Charley, traveling steadily until nightfall, when he paused by a little stream of clear running water, lighted a fire, ate the jerked venison and buffalo-meat which the soldiers had kindly given him, and stretching himself out by his fire succeeded in

putting in a good night's sleep, not awakening until broad daylight the next morning.

As near as he could judge he still had nearly a day's journey to reach the Ponca village, but set out with good spirit and at sunset had gained an elevation which overlooked the Indian village, as it nestled in its little natural basin.

A few braves were moving among the lodges, and a number of dogs barking.

"I reckon I'd better wait till it gets dark, before I make any move, as it is going to rain, and thunder, and that will be favorable. I must manage to capture the ruffian, and force him to tell me what he knows concerning the fate of Calamity. If he has harmed a hair of her head he'll find that the old maxim still holds true—that Deadwood Dick never forgets an enemy or a friend. More than one miserable wretch has found this out, I fancy."

So he waited at a safe distance from the village, until the fury of the storm was about at its height; then with revolver in hand, he crept toward the little valley and the Ponca lodges.

The wind was blowing fiercely, and driving torrents of rain before it; the lightning flashed viciously and the thunder crashed until the very earth trembled.

Deadwood Dick safely reached the vicinity of the lodges and paused, to make such reconnoissance as he was able in the Stygian darkness.

"I shall have to hunt for my man, in each lodge, till I find him," Dick concluded.

He crept toward the nearest tent, and had nearly reached it, when suddenly there was a whizzing sound, and before he could leap to one side a lasso settled around his waist, pinioning his arms to his side and jerked him to the ground.

Ere he could rise or extricate himself a foot was planted firmly upon his breast and a pair of revolvers shoved close to his face.

And the person who held them was Starlight, the Ponca.

CHAPTER XV. CONCLUSION.

"HA! ha!" she cried, her voice audible to him, but not to others. "You thought to steal a surprise on the Poncas, didn't you? But it is my privilege to prevent that. You are my prisoner, and your scalp shall hang at the belt of Starlight."

"Presume so," was Dick's terse reply.

"What brought the pale-face here?" the princess asked. "Did he regret his decision and come to take Starlight as his bride?"

"Well, no—not that I am aware of," was Dick's unequivocal answer.

"Then you will not have Starlight, eh?"

"Not under any consideration. If you are particularly eager to secure a better-half while you are young and pretty, you'd better select one of the bucks from your own tribe."

Without a word of answer she turned and uttered a war-cry high above the shriek of the storm, and almost instantly a gang of red-skins poured from the lodges, headed by Tra-la-lee Charley, and approached the spot where Starlight held her prisoner.

"Hello! what have we here?" the outlaw cried. "As I live, it is Deadwood Dick!"

"No! it is Gold-dust Dick!" Starlight cried, "and he is the prisoner of Starlight. He refused the love of the princess of the Poncas, and to-morrow he shall be bound to the stake and burned, and his scalp torn off. Starlight has said it!"

"Hurrah! That's the ticket!" Tra-la-lee Charley yelled. "There'll be no marshal to wait for in this case. Bring along the captured cur!"

Although outlandish in talk, and decidedly clumsy in appearance, Joe Dare was capable of a few good ideas, when he had any reason to use them.

He saw that he could not, in all probability, escape just at present, and so decided to pretend to wed himself to the life of the Poncas in order to disarm their vigilance, when there would be better show for him to escape.

Therefore he expressed himself as willing to join, and was forced to swear never to leave the cavern, except in company with the Aztecs, after which he was assigned a lodge, Black Hand at the same time warning him that any attempt to escape would be punishable with death.

So he spent the balance of the night in his tent in sleep.

The next morning he sauntered forth once more into the great cavern, which still had the appearance of night, as torches and fires had to be burned at day as well as night, to supply the subterranean city with light, none coming in from the outer world, and not very much air.

The strange-looking savages were mostly busied in cooking their morning meals of coffee and bear-steak, and as Joe would pass along inspecting their methods, they would bob their heads respectfully, and some of them would tender him a piece of meat.

"Dot vas a purty goot vay—I dinks I pay 'em all a visit—den I no haff to get some breakfast mineself. Dose vellers are purdy goot Injines, after all."

So he passed from one camp-fire to another, and by the time he had made a visit to them all, his appetite was quite satisfied.

To his astonishment, when he came to the last camp-fire, over which Black Hand was cooking, he found a white girl sitting near at hand, on some skins, with her hands bound behind her back.

"Hello! v'ot ish dot? Got some odder white person here, besides myself, eh?" Joe said, pausing, and noting that she was very pretty, although her attire was plain and somewhat tattered and torn.

"Yes," Black Hand replied, gruffly. "We are fatting the girl up on oily meats, for sacrifice to the Great Spirit, you see."

"Every fourth full moon, it is the custom of the Aztecs to make a sacrifice to the Great Spirit, and the fair captive you see, is the next one to come."

"Und you vas goin' to scalb her?" Joe demanded in horror.

"Oh, no! When fat enough so she will burn well, we roast her at the stake, so that her spirit can pass up in smoke to the Great Spirit."

"Und fursd you know, you vil pe roastin' me der same vay, eh?"

"If you ~~should~~ commit a misdemeanour, yes." Joe fairly groaned as he turned to another part of the cavern to meditate.

"By shimmey, dot vas grueller den anydings v'ot I neffer hearn tell of!" he muttered. "But, I'll just bet dot dey don'd vas roast dis Dutchman. I'll ~~watch~~ my chance all der while, an' der fursd oppordunity I get, I vill dake der gal und skip der Dra-la-loo."

But it looked as if he was not destined to get an opportunity to even speak to the intended victim of sacrifice, for she was soon after taken back into the lodge, and a guard stationed on the outside.

"Dot settles dot!" Joe muttered.

But that night, when in his lodge, there came stealthy footsteps, and the captive girl entered, and burst into tears almost immediately afterward.

"Oh, sir! you are a friend to me, are you not?"

"Vel, I don'd got some pig grudges ~~against~~ you dot I know anyt'ing apoud," Joe replied.

"Oh, then, come; let us try to escape from this place. If I stay here, I will be killed, and you, too, it is likely."

"Who you vas, anyhow? V'ot's your name, an' vare you pelong?"

"I belong far from here. I am the wife of Deadwood Dick—perhaps you may have heard of him. One time I was known as Calamity Jane."

"Ish dot so? Vy, Deadwood Dick vas in Pistolvile the other day, in jail, but some vellers come along an' let him out."

"Thank heaven for that! Do you suppose we could find him if we get away from here?"

"Vel, maybe."

Joe did not tell her that, as he supposed, the marshal had taken Dick to the nearest military post for trial.

Poor Calamity! She looked worn and haggard—enough—but a shadow of her old self.

Joe released her of her bonds, so that she could steal forth and make reconnaissance, for the cavern was densely dark, now, the fires with one or two exceptions, having all died out, and the Indians had generally retired to their lodges.

Calamity soon returned, with a pair of carbines, and some ammunition.

"It's all right, if we go as sly as cats. The reds in the lodges are all asleep, and the one at the entrance is too, and we can get by him, if we're mighty sly at it."

"Vel, den you bet I'll be just as light as a musgeeter," Joe declared, eagerly. "Shall I lead off, or you?"

"I will lead—you follow. I fancy I know a little better than you do about dodgin'."

She accordingly stole from the lodge, with him close behind her, and toward the flue-entrance to the cavern.

By great stealth they succeeded in passing the slumbering guard, and half an hour later, stood out in the gulch, free—if so be they were not pursued and recaptured.

The last scene of our story changes to the Ponca village.

In the center of the Plaza, which was encircled

by the lodges, was a stout post planted in the ground, and to this Deadwood Dick was securely bound with strong lariats.

It was almost sunset hour, of the afternoon following the night of his capture.

It indeed looked as if he was soon to pay the penalty of death that had been imposed upon him.

Dry leaves and fagots had been piled up around the prisoner ready for the torch.

Just as the sun touched the horizon, the Indians and white ruffians began to howl and screech, and perform the scalp or death-dance around the stake.

When they had yelled themselves hoarse, Starlight came from her lodge, with knife in hand, and approached the stake, her eyes gleaming with wicked triumph.

"Gold-dust Dick, you refused to marry Starlight, and Starlight will wear your scalp!" she said. "All who wrong me I hate—all who steal what is mine I kill and scalp. I wedded Tra-la-lee Charley under his promise to help me be revenged on you, but he played me false, for he brought the mad girl Dora here as his sister! Ha! I killed her and her long hair scalp is in my lodge. Now your scalp-lock shall be tied to hers for—"

She said no more, for with a wonderful bound Joe Dare was at her side, livid with rage at the revelation she had made.

"You accursed hell-cat! Killed my child did you?" he yelled, at the same moment shooting her through the heart as she turned to confront him, while, as if answering his shot there came a volley from the hill, and ten awe-stricken savages dropped dead in their tracks. Amid the sudden shrieks and yells, into the Plaza bounded two women on horseback, firing right and left. They were followed by a band of soldiery, who with their revolvers soon consummated the work of slaughter, for, seemingly not a red devil of all the savage horde escaped.

The soldiers were the band of miners who had once before rescued Deadwood Dick, and the two women, of course, were Roxie Ralph and Calamity Jane.

Roxie had followed Dick and learned of his capture, and going in pursuit of the miners had overtaken them, and induced them to return to Dick's rescue.

On their way to the village they had met Calamity and Joe Dare, and cautiously approaching the Indian village had witnessed all that transpired and stood with ready rifles to make the dash when the Ponca princess came forth. Joe Dare, recognizing Tra-la-lee Charley, had approached near enough to overhear the words of the red vixen, and infuriated to madness had opened the attack as described. His first shot killed Starlight, his second, as Charley leaped at him with a horrible oath, was delivered right in that villain's face, and the very oath on his lips seemed to be forced down his throat, as the ball struck his open mouth.

"Das much vor mine poor gal!" he screamed as he plunged immediately into the bloody fray. He seemed like a demon let loose, and made an awful record on that bloody day.

A word in closing.

The meeting between Dick and Calamity was of course joyful, after her having passed through many trying ordeals, first as the prisoner of Tra-la-lee Charley, by whom she had been whipped nearly to death for her bravado and defiance to him and left to die, only to be picked up by the Aztecs.

She and Dick at once set out for a more remote and inaccessible part of the West, wherein to hide their identity, Dick first delivering to Joe Dare the deed he had received from Tra-la-lee Charley.

Dare then returned to Pistolville, to lead a lonely but better life, while Roxie Ralph went also, and soon after became the wife of the stage-driver, Jack Mahone.

THE END.

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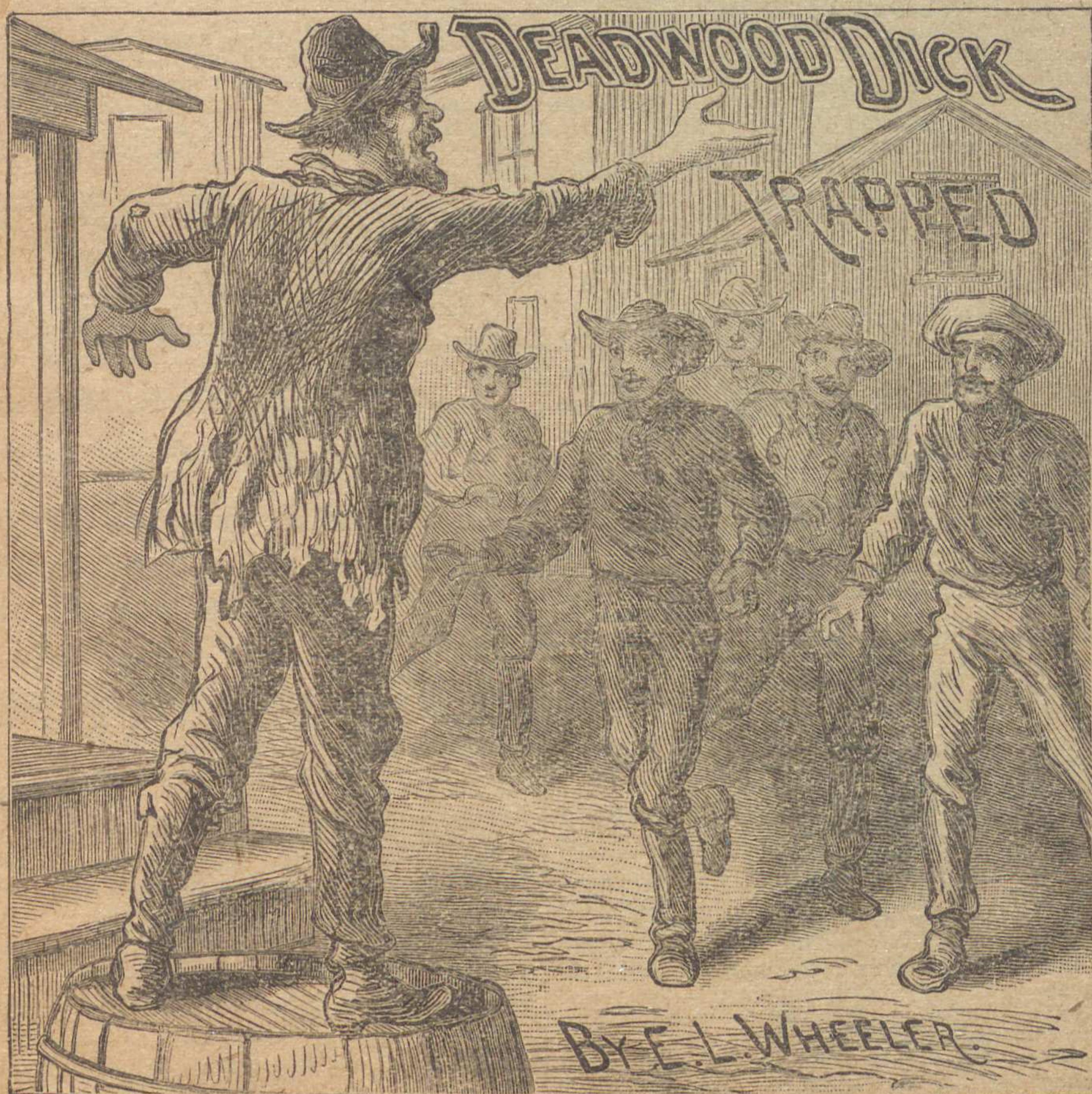


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